Living Guidebook

How to Write a ROLL PLAYER ADVENTURE

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Introduction

Welcome to Ulos!

This document was created with an adventure creator in mind. In this document, we will give you some guidance in building, structuring, writing, and creating your own adventures for the Roll Player Adventures game system. This document is split into five major sections covering: planning, narrative design, mechanical design, backstories, and various appendix resources. The pages below will cover basic concepts, useful tips, and formatting standards. We assume that readers have played Roll Player Adventures and are familiar with its gameplay and terminology.

NOTE: This document contains spoilers for various adventures of Roll Player Adventures.

Please review the Licensing Information regarding creating your own RPA adventures at www.thunderworksgames.com/rpla

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Terminology

Adventure: A collection of game materials: storybook, map, discovery cards (item and location), title cards, rare cards, modifier cards, enemy cards, and a set of entries in road encounter books like the Tome of Encounters.

Branching Error: An error produced when the players are sent to a nonexistent or incorrect passage by the game text.

Campaign: A series of adventures that tell an overarching story. Players play a single group of characters that grow more powerful as they progress through the series.

Death Check: A special action indicator that checks to see if the entire party is exhausted. These usually send the players to a set of entries in a road encounter book.

Dice Event: A gameplay moment that focuses on dice manipulation, instead of narrative choices. Combat and Skill Checks are dice events.

Discoverable Location: A map location that is not on the adventure map at the start of an adventure, but is added to the map as the result of revealing a discovery card.

Encounter: A collection of entries, held together by branching choices and/or other mechanical text, regardless of whether those entries appear in the adventure storybook or a road encounter book like the Tome of Encounters.

- **Location Encounter:** A narrative encounter triggered by moving the player marker to a lettered location on the adventure map.
- **Road Encounter:** A narrative encounter triggered by an encounter token along a movement path on the adventure map.

Entry: A single section of text, labeled with a letter and/or number

> *Example: "A," "C55.67," and "SQ1-36" and the subsequent text beneath each are entries.*

- **Base Entry:** An entry in a storybook that corresponds with the letter of a map location. These are the entries read by the players when they reach a location for the first time.

> *Example: Storybook entries labeled "A," "B," etc, are base entries.*

- **Location Entry:** Any entry that is not the result of item use. Base entries are a type of location entry, as are all the entries the base entry directs the player to.
- **Item Entry:** An entry in a storybook that corresponds with the letter of a map location plus the number of an item or items. These entries are usually in the later portion of a group of entries for a location and tell the players what happens when they attempt to use an item or pair of items at the location.

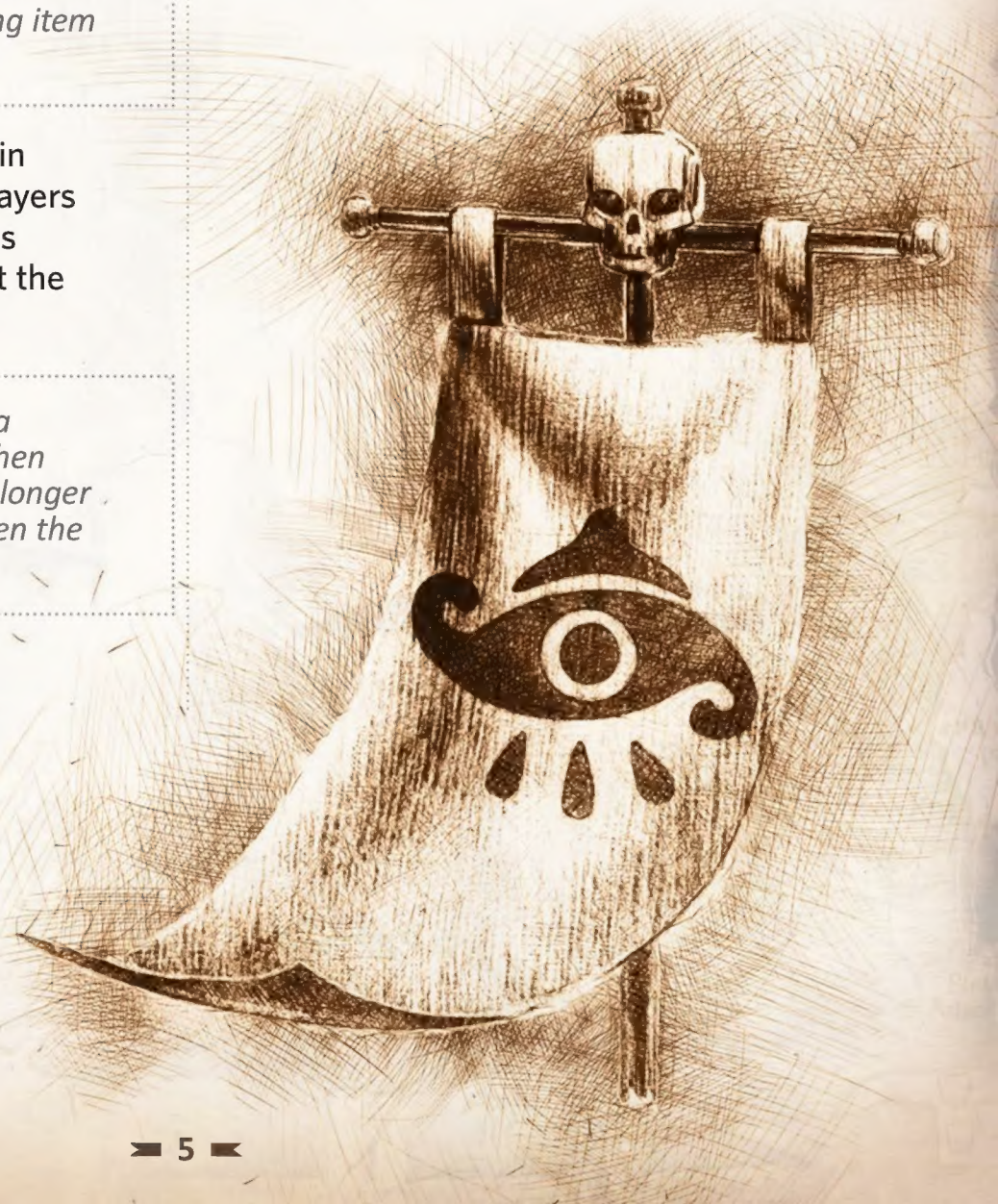
Example: Storybook entry labeled "C47" contains the result of using item number 47 at location C.

Narrative Bug: An inconsistency in the story that occurs when the players encounter a passage that contains information that contradicts what the players already know to be true.

Example: If a party encounters a character at a location who is then killed, that character should no longer appear alive at the location when the players return to it.

Narrative Branching: When a storybook redirects the players to another entry as the result of action or choice indicators.

Road Encounter Book: A storybook that is used in conjunction with the adventure storybook that contains entries corresponding with the results of encounter tokens on an adventure map or death text.



Planning

When beginning to construct an adventure, it's helpful to step through some of the higher level details before beginning to write the first entry. You may want to use the provided Adventure Planning Sheet (Appendix 5) at the end of this document to guide you through this process.

Adventure Name

Every adventure needs a compelling name. If you are planning on creating a sequence of adventures, you'll also want to give the adventure a number as well as give the campaign a creative name. A great name can inspire a compelling story, or vice versa. Often the final name of the adventure does not come into focus until later in the writing process, but it's good to give it a name as you begin planning to focus your efforts, even if it changes later. Generally it's a good idea to find something interesting, and potentially mysterious, while avoiding titles that are too literal to create interest and desire to explore the adventure.

Examples:

- **Bad Titles:** The Fantasy Adventure, Fight the Warlock
- **Good Titles:** Mystery of the Subterranean Lake, Ancient Elder's Demise

Adventure Core Concept / High Level Summary

Finding the core concept of an adventure is a great place to start. Here you will often begin to find the necessary characters to set up the story and build the player's motivation to go adventuring.

- What kind of choices do you want the players to make?
- What do you want the players to feel when they play your adventure?
- What is the core tension in the adventure?
- How does that tension resolve, and how many ways can it be resolved?
- If you're leading into another adventure, how does it dovetail into that adventure?
- How does this adventure fit into the overarching story?

Adventure Objective

Having a clear motivation and objective for the players drives them to play your adventure. It also gives an adventure a sense of purpose. Often the core tension of the adventure drives the objective for the players. Objectives should be easily understood and clear to the players. The more specific the objective is, the better.

Examples:

- Find a specific object
- Solve a mystery or crime
- Rescue a character in danger
- Defeat a powerful enemy
- Destroy an object of power
- Create something, or learn some skill/ability

Objectives can change or develop throughout an adventure. The players may think their objective is one thing, but as they explore the objective, it can morph into something else, or can be changed entirely.

Adventures can also have multiple objectives. When supporting multiple objectives, it's best if the objectives are related to one another somehow. Often they are opposing objectives related to the same threat, meaning the players will have to choose to complete one objective or the other by the end of the adventure, not both.

Adventure Setting

Where does your adventure take place? Why is that interesting? How is it different from other adventure settings?

It's possible to use one of the existing maps provided in Roll Player Adventures. This can limit the amount of variety you can create for your adventure, but it can be easier to develop. Or you may wish to create a new map of your own.

Planning the Adventure Map

A map is a collection of locations you want the players to visit. Maps usually have 4-5 locations visible at the beginning of the adventure with 1-4 discoverable locations appearing later in the adventure. The "A" location is always the starting location for the players, while locations B and C often are connected to location A.

When planning the initial location, it's important to include clear motivations for where the players might want to travel next. Usually there are multiple movement paths from location A. Provide motivation for the players for all paths connected to location A. Establishing those motivations during planning can help develop details about other locations in the adventure and create interesting decisions for the players.

Example:

> In "Taron's Trophy", players are motivated to head both towards the Dungrass Farm, as it is the home of the missing girl, and the Beach, as the Giant Trolls were last seen there.

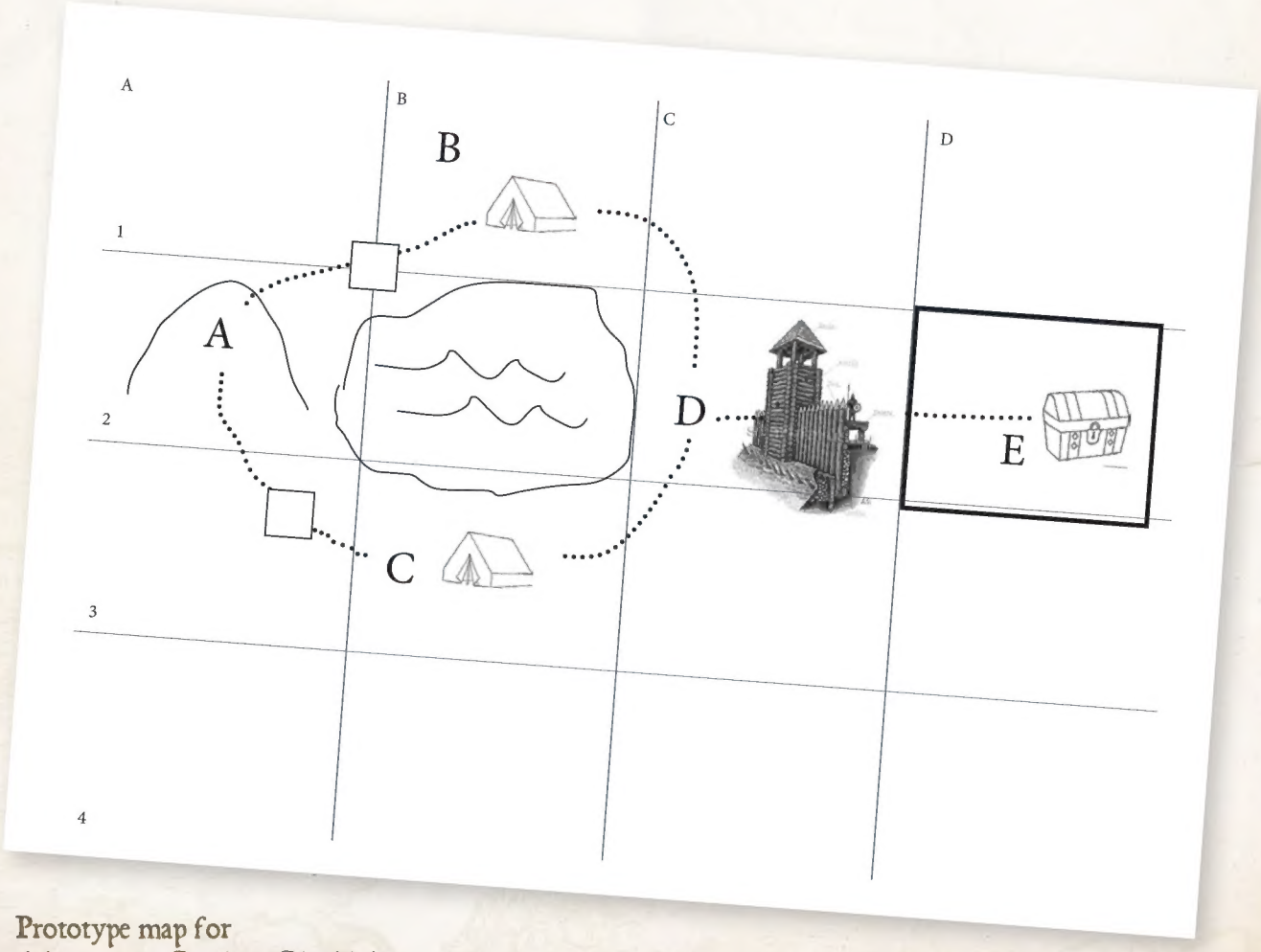
It may be helpful to brainstorm different types of locations you want to include in your adventure, as a location can lead to interesting narrative moments, or allow the players to meet interesting characters.

Examples:

- Include a castle to meet the king
- Include a farm to meet farmers
- Include a cavern to create a spooky atmosphere
- Include a volcano to create treacherous terrain

Remember that every map is aligned to a 4x4 grid, for placement of discovery cards, though it can be oriented vertically or horizontally. At this stage, it's often helpful to sketch out a rough map, adding locations and movement paths.

- Avoid creating "dead end" movement paths.
- Place locations near the edges of the map grid spaces if you intend to place a discovery card next to it so that the discovery card can have a movement path that connects to the existing network of paths and locations.



Prototype map for
Adventure 1: Battle at Blacklake

- Most adventures have four encounter spaces placed on movement paths. These can be included on revealed discovery cards, or can be present from the beginning of the adventure.
- If you wish to add encounter spaces when discovery cards are revealed, the pool of encounter tokens must be set up differently.
    - *See* Adventure 9: Gurlung Colossus *for a simple example that adds an encounter token on an encounter space that appears on a revealed discovered location.*
    - *See* Adventure 6: Bogroot Demon *for a more complex example of how to do this. The storybook instructs the players to create a second pool of encounter tokens once they reach location D and two new locations are revealed.*
- You may also specify that a particular encounter token be placed on a specific encounter space by marking it with a star and including the instruction during setup, as in Aventure 8: Dragons of the Sunken City.

Innovation

Some adventures add unique mechanics or some other new element to the existing system for Roll Player Adventures. Take a look at your core concept and see if there's something new or different you can add to how it works that hasn't been done previously. It's always a welcome addition for players to see twists on what they've seen before. Some good examples of innovation can be seen in the use of ships in *Adventure 8: Dragons of the Sunken City* or the sentry in *Adventure 9: Gurlung Colossus*.

Standard adventures contain:

- Locations
- Discoverable Locations
- Movement Paths
- Road Encounters
- Dice Events
- Item Use
- Faction Favor
- Keywords
- Title Cards

There are opportunities to adjust how these things work in your adventure to help create variance in gameplay.

Not all adventures need something mechanically innovative about them, but it's worth thinking about and looking for opportunities. Experimenting with more innovative ideas is often best done once the basics of an adventure are established, but experienced creators may want to explore new ideas early to build their adventure around the innovation.

Item Use

The item system in Roll Player Adventures offers more narrative opportunities on top of the core adventure narrative, but also allows the players to engage in the world by picking up and using party items. Items can be used to open doors for the players, create puzzles, and add depth to your adventure. It's best to give the players at least one item at location A of your adventure to give them something to engage with starting in the first scene. Plan to add three to six items to your adventure.

Not all items need to appear on the core path through the adventure. Some may be buried in deep narrative branches and be difficult to find, or they can be mutually exclusive from another item (If you get item X, you can't get item Y).

Adventure Ending

Every good story has a good ending. You should plan how your adventure will end with your core tension and party objectives in mind. Think about the location and setting for that final scene and attempt to build up to that moment and make it special.

Mechanically, adventures often end with a unique skill check or combat scenario (see Special Dice Events). Other times, they can end after completing an item puzzle, or large narrative moment to give the adventure a sense of finality.

After the conclusion of a climatic event, it's best to allow players to continue to explore the map using items in different combinations, or investigate incomplete mysteries. It's best not to end the adventure right away, in case the players have tasks they want to complete before moving onto the next adventure.

Some storybooks, however, force the players to the end of the adventure when a specific event occurs, making it impossible to backtrack. Often this is due to a world state change that is not supported in the storybook in all locations. If you decide to force the end of an adventure, be sure to warn the players ahead of time that once they go to a certain location, or take a certain action the adventure will end.

For example, in *Adventure 3: Outbreak in Undercity*, the players are alerted that when they return to location A, the adventure will end, though they have the freedom to explore until they're ready to move to the end:

> *Now that your encounter with the Vampire has been resolved, you may return to Zalic at location A at any time to end your adventure.*

Adventure Length

Adventures are designed to take 90-120 minutes to play and have no "save" mechanism within an adventure. In other words, they are designed to play within a single session. There are a number of elements that can contribute to the length of an adventure.

- **Dice Events:** Adventures usually have roughly 8 dice events. Combat takes a little longer than a skill check, especially if it's a special combat.
- **Entry Length:** Entries should be roughly 100-150 words in length, and should never be over 200 words.
- **Items:** Adventures have roughly 3-6 usable items.
- **Locations:** Adventures have roughly 6 locations.
- **Road Encounters:** Adventures have roughly 4 road encounters.

When planning your adventure, you might want to think about what kind of story you can tell within those limits. When playtesting an adventure, it's very common that the playtime will be longer than expected. You'll often find it necessary to simplify or eliminate elements to reduce the playtime.

Playtesting and Revising

Playtesting and revising is critical to the success of an adventure. Playtest your new adventure with your friends, family and eventually outside groups to get feedback on your adventure so you can make it even better. This iterative process will help you find branching errors, inconsistencies, misspellings, and grammar issues. It will help you improve the readability of your entries, and confirm the playtime of the adventure. It's always a good idea to make sure you've solved as many of the larger/obvious issues before making it available publicly.

Narrative Design

In this section, we'll dig into some of the details of designing storybook entries, including some templates for you to use to get you started.

Foundational Concept: Narrative Layers

In general, you can think of an adventure as composed of three distinct but overlapping narrative layers–location encounters, road encounters, and item entries.

Stringing several adventures together to tell a longer story introduces two additional narrative layers: campaign elements and backstories.

Location encounters occur at map locations. These tell the story of the adventurers making progress toward a primary goal and overcoming major obstacles along the way.

Road encounters occur between locations along connected movement paths between locations. These tell the story of the adventurers meeting local people, enemies, and related dilemmas.

Item entries occur when players use items at map locations. These entries tell the story of the adventurers finding objects and manipulating the story world to uncover secrets. These entries usually fall into three categories: lore exposition, puzzle hints/completion, or humor, which are detailed later.

Campaign elements are the aspects of Roll Player Adventures that create tension, track party choices, implement narrative consequences, and build to a dramatic climax over the course of several adventures. These elements must work together across all adventures in a campaign to achieve their effect and to connect each adventure together into a larger, coherent narrative.

Backstories are sets of narrative encounters, spread across the course of a campaign, that tell a story of an individual player character. They should give players a feeling of playing a specific character with a unique relationship to the world of Ulos.

Ideally, all of these narrative layers will work together to craft a rich and immersive narrative experience.

Writing Guidelines

The simultaneously singular and plural "you"

Roll Player Adventures is written in the second person, directly addressing the player or players as "you." This creates some tricky writing situations, where you'll need to imagine how an encounter will sound if read by a solitaire player and also how it will sound when read aloud to a group. As a general rule, it is best to describe scenes from a single player's perspective. Consider the following two phrasings of the same idea:

1. You each draw your weapons and attack.
2. You draw your weapon and attack.

These both communicate the same idea, but the first phrasing will break the immersion of a single player, who is alone and probably imagines themself drawing a single weapon. On the other hand, the second phrasing does NOT break the immersion of a group, where each player hears the sentence as describing their own behavior.

However, there are some times where single-player description can be pushed too far for group immersion. Consider the following:

> You squeeze into the narrow passage and begin picking the lock.

If this line initiates a Thiefcraft skill check, players in a group will wonder how they are all simultaneously squeezing into the narrow passage and collectively picking the lock. The line works fine for a single player, but breaks the immersion of a group.

In short, describe things as if you were writing for a single player, but do your best to make sure the things you are describing could still be performed by a group.

Assume Nothing

When writing for Roll Player Adventures, the heroes of the story can be any number of different races, classes, or genders. They have one of many backstories and all carry different equipment. As a result, an entry can never assume the players are anything specific. So avoid any language in your entries that assume the player is something specific, as every narrative passage has to work for every possible character the players are playing.

Write for the Spoken Word

Keep in mind that players will be reading your written word aloud. There are a few considerations to keep in mind when selecting words and structuring sentences.

- Choose words are relatively easy to pronounce.
- Avoid words that can be pronounced multiple ways, or make sure which pronunciation is clear based on context. ***Examples:*** Bass, Project.
- Avoid overly long sentences, as the meaning can get confusing and readers are more likely to stumble as they read a long passage.
- If a character speaks in a certain way, include that detail before the character starts speaking so the reader can imitate the style.

Example: She spotted the guard and lowered her voice. "We're not safe here."

Avoid Identical Text in Multiple Entries

When an entry branches, try to avoid using too much repeated text in the branched entries, even if the player is unlikely to read both branches in the same play session. If there is only a small difference between the branches of an encounter, as a creator, it may be tempting to copy and paste the content from one to another making only a required small change to create a difference. We call this "copypasta" and try to avoid it when possible. It's best to make sure that entries differ significantly, so if the player plays the adventure again and makes different choices, they read entries that are not too similar to the entries on the alternate branches.

Less is More

In the interest of keeping the story to the adventure moving, and avoiding fatigue from reading too much narrative in one stretch, try to keep entries short. When an entry is starting to feel heavy, or there's too much information being communicated in a small space, consider removing details and complexity from the scene. This is often the best path forward for an entry that is troublesome.

Objectionable Content

Roll Player Adventures is intended to be enjoyed by players over the age of 14. Generally, we maintain a "PG-13" level or lower guideline for explicit content.

We encourage you to keep this audience in mind as you write, so that you can create enjoyable experiences that are popular with the player base. Adventures centering around racism, sexism, graphically violent acts, homophobia, sexual assault, or other potentially offensive subjects are not conducive to the kind of experience we want to create for our players.

Your Adventure Begins

Each storybook in Roll Player Adventures begins with a short entry that describes where the players are and what they are trying to accomplish. If the adventure is part of a campaign, this entry also briefly describes the adventure so far, or at least the most recent and relevant events.

Importantly, the "Your Adventure Begins" entries should always set a clear goal for players to accomplish during the adventure. Players need to know what their character's primary motivation is for exploring the map and interacting with other characters in order to make sense of the decisions that you will present to them. Goals also help players feel like they are making narrative progress over the course of an adventure and that they have reached a narratively satisfying conclusion at its end.

Of course, the goals you set for players at the beginning of an adventure can evolve during play. In writing Roll Player Adventures, we tried to support player actions that deviate from the stated goals of the adventure. For example, in Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy, *players are given a clear goal: fetch King Taron the head of a Giant Troll. But, during the course of the adventures, players can befriend the Trolls instead and return to the king empty-handed; thereby changing the rest of the campaign in subtle and not so subtle ways.*

Location and Road Encounters

Both location encounters and road encounters share some basic elements: They are composed of entries linked together by choices and other mechanics, and they often present combat and skill checks to players. There are many, many ways to structure encounters, more than can be covered here, but the common forms presented here will get you started.

Road Encounters

Players find road encounters between locations on the adventure map. When designing the road encounters for an adventure, it's important to think about them as a collection of events. Attempt to interconnect with the core narrative or with each other by using recurring characters, themes, or events. This can increase the sense of discovery for players and create a more cohesive world.

For example, in *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*, the road encounters mostly center around secondary characters supporting the main narrative of the missing girl and the Giant Trolls. The missing parents, hunting parties for the missing girl, the missing girl's pig, and a noble imprisoned for the theft of the missing pig.

Keep in mind players may not see all the road encounters for a specific adventure, and that the players will experience them in any order, so you may have to be clever how scenes are described or how characters speak to avoid narrative bugs. It may be necessary to use keywords or title card branching to sidestep the potential bugs.

When planning road encounters for your adventure, be sure to take a look at how many encounters you want to include in the adventure before creating any branching in the narrative in the core story.

The first few entries of the road encounter storybook for each adventure should be reserved for the base entry for each road encounter. For example, if your adventure has four encounters, reserve the first four entries in the road encounter book for that adventure for the base entries for each of those encounters.

> *Example: For the four road encounters in* Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy, *the Tome of Encounters uses entries ADV2-1, ADV2-2, ADV2-3, and ADV2-4 for the starting point for each encounter, and all branching from those entries leads to entries either ADV2-5 or higher.*

Base Entry Location Encounter

Some locations do not contain dice events or narrative choices. They simply describe a location and then give players the standard set of choices that signal the end of an encounter. For example, the "A" locations in adventures 1, 2, and 3 are all variants on this basic structure:

A

⚠ If there is no XP at this location → A1

⚠ Otherwise, collect the XP from this location and continue reading.

[Description of location]

[Clarification of goals for adventure]

[Hints about locations, so players have information about where to go next]

? Use an item.

? Move to another location.

A1

[Brief description of the location, so players don't have to read too much when they return]

? Use an item.

? Rest.

? Move to another location.

Notice that at entry A, the first two action indicators act as a kind of "gate" that prevents players from looping content. Players will read entry A when they first visit location A, but when they return, they will be redirected to entry A1, which offers a much shorter description.

You will also notice that entry A and entry A1 each end with a different set of choice indicators. Entry A1 ends with the full standard set of choice indicators, which are placed at the end of any entry that ends an encounter:

? Use an item.

? Rest.

? Move to another location.

Any time players complete a passage that constitutes the "end" of a branch, they need these three choice indicators to direct them back to the other systems in the game.

Entry A eliminates the option to "? Rest" because it is only read at the very start of an adventure, when players have no need of resting.

Pacing: Balancing Reading with Other Mechanics

In a narrative game like this one, long stretches of text can leave the players with a feeling of reading fatigue. We find it best to break up the narrative with player choices and other mechanics at regular intervals.

When writing an adventure, we recommend targeting a 150 word maximum for each entry, with a hard limit of 200 words. This way, players don't have to read too long without making a choice or rolling some dice.

We encourage you to pay attention to the rhythm of your adventures: from reading to throwing dice and back to reading again. Try to keep a brisk pace, so that players aren't reading too long without gameplay, or rolling dice too long without story.

Action Indicators that Redirect Players to Other Entries

Any encounter can be made more complex with the addition of action indicators that redirect players to other entries based on one or more game elements. When players are redirected by an action or choice indicator, this is called this branching.

Action indicators can branch based on: keywords, titles, faction favor, possession of a market card or rare card, amount of gold or XP, amount of stamina in an attribute row or fatigue box, character race or class, or any other game element.

For example, in *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*, location A branches on two keywords before branching on "no XP":

A. Jolev

⚠ If you have the keyword ESTHER → A6

⚠ If you have the keyword MARKET → A4

⚠ If there is no XP at this location → A1

⚠ Otherwise, collect the XP from this location and continue reading.

Similarly, in *Adventure 3: Outbreak in Undercity*, location A branches on faction favor just before ending:

> ⚠ If your 🔥 is two or higher → A2
> ? Use an item.
> ? Move to another location.

As long as it suits your narrative, you can create more complex and responsive encounters by using action indicators to branch this way.

State-Change Location Encounter

Narrative choices, combat and skill check outcomes, item puzzles, and other mechanisms can result in a state change at a location. A state change is an alteration in the fictional world that results from player behavior.

For example, in *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*, when players solve the bell-and-door puzzle at location B, the durgolium door opens. Therefore, when they return to this location, the door should be open, not closed.

As a general rule, if players return to a location where they've made a state change, they should not read any text that either a) describes the location in its unchanged state or b) allows the player character to try to change the state a second time (for example, text that describes them trying to solve an already solved item puzzle).

Therefore, when a state is changed, players should record a keyword that is then used to redirect them to an entry where the state is described differently.

Remember that action indicators are always resolved sequentially from top to bottom. This often moves the players to a new entry before resolving the current entry.

For example, when players solve the item puzzle at the Ancient Chapel (entry B85.93), they are directed to record the keyword *DISCOVER*. Then, at the base entry (B), players read the following action indicators:

> **B. Ancient Chapel**
> ⚠ If you have the keyword DISCOVER → B10
> ⚠ If there is no XP at this location → B1
> ⚠ Otherwise, collect the XP from this location and continue reading.

Notice that the *DISCOVER* action indicator is placed **above** the "no XP" indicator. This is because we want players who return after solving the puzzle to be redirected immediately to B10, rather than reading B1, which describes the puzzle in an unsolved state and offers players the option to use items (which leads in turn to entries that describe players attempting to solve the puzzle). On the other hand, B10 reads as follows:

> **B10**
>
> The ancient chapel is cold and empty. The open durgolium door sits in a multicolored patch of sunlight that filters through the fractured stained glass. The chamber below is now empty.
>
> ? Rest.
>
> ? Move to another location.

Notice that B10 describes the open door (solved puzzle state) and does NOT include the option to use items.

As a general rule, item puzzles, once solved, should give players keywords that redirect them to entries where they do not have the option to use items.

Choice Branching

Much of the branching that happens in Roll Player Adventures happens as a result of choice indicators, set up by descriptive narrative passages.

For example, in *Adventure 1: Battle at Blacklake* at location E, players are given this choice:

> ? Attack the Ogre . → E2
>
> ? Try to understand what he is saying (INT, WIS). → E3

These two choices lead to different mechanical systems, indicated by the symbols following the narrative description of the choice. signals that players are choosing to engage in combat with the Ogre, and this symbol should be used every time a choice leads to an entry with a combat. signals that players are choosing to engage in a skill check and is always followed by the two dominant attributes that will be used in the check, in this case INT and WIS. This symbol and the appropriate attributes should always be used every time a choice leads to an entry with a skill check. Further, the two attributes are always listed in this order: STR, DEX, CON, INT, WIS, CHA.

Choice Balance

Aim for balanced choices wherever possible. A balanced choice is where players have equally weighted motivations to choose each option in a set of Choice Indicators. When the reasons for choosing options aren't clear, rewrite the narrative before the choice to clarify what is at stake in the decision, and what the potential outcome for each option might be.

For example, this is a set of Choice Indicators in Adventure 1: Battle at Blacklake*, at location E:*

? Attack the Ogre (combat). → E2

? Try to understand what he is saying ⌖ (INT, WIS). → E3

In the first draft of this entry, the Ogre was described as very sympathetic. During playtesting, players felt that they didn't have a good reason to pick the first option. We revised the scene so that the Ogre was angry, his intentions were unclear, and our accomplice, Tarik Nowlin, was sneaking up behind him, expecting our help with the kill. In the new scene, players had good reasons to attack, as the Ogre was dangerous and Tarik wanted him dead, and good reasons to talk with him, as the Ogre was trying to communicate. This wasn't a perfectly balanced choice, but it was much more balanced than the first draft.

In general, when writing choices, aim to support them with narrative that gives players good reasons to pick each option in the set.

It's also possible to include additional choice options to an entry, though balancing the choices when there are three, or even four options becomes increasingly challenging, and supporting the number of possible outcomes with the required entries can become complex. Be aware of the scope growth that occurs when you add too many choices in a given entry.

Simple Choice-then-Dice Structure

Most encounters are built on the following basic structure that first provides a narrative choice, then leads to either a skill check or combat, and then resolves with the win/loss conditions of the dice mechanics.

Here is a template for this structure as it appears in road encounters:

Template	Commentary
ADV1 [Description of situation] [Good reasons to choose both choices] ? [Choice text A] ✥ (SKL, CHK). → ADV5 ? [Choice text B] ✊. → ADV6 **ADV5** [Description of skill check attempt] SKILL CHECK: [Name] [Level] > Pass: [Pass description sentence] → ADV7 > Fail: [Fail description sentence] → ADV8	In the Tome of Encounters, road encounters are identified by the letters ADV, followed by the number of the adventure. You will want to create a unique three-letter abbreviation for your adventure, and then use it to label each entry of your road encounters. Not every choice has to be between a skill check and a combat. Sometimes choices lead to different combat or different skill checks. Other times choices are purely narrative, without leading to dice events. Notice the numbering gap between entries 1 and 5. This gap is a result of the encounter tokens, whose numbers must correspond to the first entry of each road encounter. In an adventure that has four road encounters, numbers 1-4 must be used for the first entry in each encounter, and so the second entry of the first encounter would use number 5.

Template	Commentary
ADV6 [Description of starting combat] COMBAT: [Modifier, if any] [Enemy Name] [Number] > Victory: [Victory description sentence] → ADV9 > Defeat: [Defeat description sentence] → ADV10	***Death Checks*** The action indicator that checks to see if the entire party is exhausted is called a death check. Normally, a death check only occurs in the entry of a defeat result from combat. However, anytime you "wound" players by including action indicators that add stamina to their fatigue boxes, you should also include a death check, just in case the added "wound" exhausts the entire party.
ADV7 [Skill Check Pass description] [⚠ Any action indicators for rewards, keywords, or titles] ? Rest. ? Move to the next location on your path.	
ADV8 [Skill Check Fail description] [⚠ Any action indicators for consequences, keywords, or titles] [If you add stamina to a player's fatigue box as a consequence, add the "death check" text: "⚠ If your entire party is exhausted, mark the death track and read the corresponding entry in the Tome of Encounters."] ? Rest. ? Move to the next location on your path.	

Template	Commentary
ADV9 [Combat Victory description] [⚠ Any action indicators for rewards, keywords, or titles] ? Rest. ? Move to the next location on your path.	***Closing Choice Indicators*** Notice that the closing sets of choice indicators all exclude the option to use items. This is because road encounters never include item usage. Also notice that the "move" option is worded differently here. At locations, the choice indicator is phrased "? Move to another location." In road encounters, this is replaced with "? Move to the next location on your path." because players have road encounters when they are already enroute to a chosen location.
ADV10 [Combat Defeat description] [⚠ Any action indicators for consequences, keywords, or titles] [If you are using the death system of the core campaign, add the "death check" text: "⚠ If your entire party is exhausted, mark the death track and read the corresponding entry in the Tome of Encounters."] ? Rest. ? Move to the next location on your path.	

Multistage Combat

Sometimes you may want to blend narrative into a combat by adding special branches to a combat sequence. For example, in *Adventure 3: Outbreak in Undercity*, the "boss" encounter with the vampire uses a special structure to branch the narrative mid-combat, providing more variety and challenge. Here's a template for multistage combat:

Template	Commentary
A6 [Description of threat] **SPECIAL COMBAT** The following combat will redirect you to a new storybook entry after the first round. Make sure to read the three possible outcomes once the first round is complete and turn to the corresponding entry in this storybook. **COMBAT**: [enemy name] [enemy number] Victory at the end of the first round: [description of the combat changing and continuing]. (Leave any played cards in your discard space.) → A7 Defeat at the end of the first round: [Defeat description]. → F9 Neither victory nor defeat at the end of the first round: [Description of combat change] → A8	Multistage combat is always introduced with the "special combat" rules text to indicate that it works differently than normal combat. Combat results in multistage combat are three-fold: victory in the first round, defeat in the first round, or neither victory nor defeat in the first round. Notice that the "Victory at the end of the first round" line includes the parenthetical "(Leave any played cards in your discard space.)". This is to prevent players from picking up their cards as if combat was over.

Template	Commentary
A7 [More detailed description of combat change, renewed threat] [Any action indicators necessary to remove dice from the enemy card, add modifier cards, swap out enemy cards, add new enemy cards, or alter combat in some other way] ⚠ Place the round marker on the second space of the round track and continue combat. Victory: [Victory description] → A10 Defeat: [Defeat description] → A9	If players are not defeated in round one, the combat continues. If players are victorious in round one, the enemy card can be swapped out for another, some number of dice can be removed from the card, and/or reinforcements can arrive in the form of new enemy cards. In any of these cases, it will be helpful to include an action indicator that tells players what to do with the "defeated" enemy card. For example: ⚠ Do not collect the rewards on the [enemy name] enemy card. Return the card to the supply and return all dice to the dice bag. Leave any played cards in your discard pile. This action indicator clearly directs players not to follow the normal procedures for a victory result.
A8 [More detailed description of combat change, renewed threat] [Any action indicators necessary to remove dice from the enemy card, add modifier cards, swap out enemy cards, add new enemy cards, or alter combat in some other way] Victory: [Victory description] → A10 Defeat: [Defeat description] → A9	

Template	Commentary
A9 [Detailed defeat description] [Any action indicators to adjust keywords, titles, or favor, or to hand out rewards or penalties] ? Use an item. ? Rest. ? Move to another location. --- **A10** [Detailed victory description] [Any action indicators to adjust keywords, titles, or favor, or to hand out rewards or penalties] ? Use an item. ? Rest. ? Move to another location.	

Complex Branching (and the Dangers Thereof)

Sometimes, you may want an encounter to be responsive to multiple choices players made earlier in the game. For example, if players made an Ogre angry but then befriended a Satyr, and now they arrive at a location that contains both the Ogre and the Satyr, you would want the story to respond appropriately by presenting players with an angry Ogre and friendly Satyr.

But this means you will have to account for all possible permutations of two independent character-related choices: Ogre choice + Satyr choice. If the Ogre choice was binary: make the Ogre happy or angry, and the Satyr choice was also binary: make a friend or a foe of the Satyr, then you have 2 x 2 = 4 possible permutations to account for.

1. The Ogre is happy, and the Satyr is friendly.
2. The Ogre is happy, but the Satyr is a foe.
3. The Ogre is angry, but the Satyr is friendly.
4. The Ogre is angry, and the Satyr is a foe.

Handling each of these permutations will require some branching at the base entry. Something like this:

Template	Commentary
Location C: Ogre and Satyr's House **C** ⚠ If there is no XP at this location → C1 ⚠ If you have the keyword [SATYR IS A FRIEND] → C2 ⚠ If you have the keyword [OGRE IS HAPPY] → C3 [This text describes the encounter with angry-Ogre and Satyr-foe.] --- **C1** [This text describes returning to this location.] --- **C2** ⚠ If you have the keyword [OGRE IS HAPPY] → C4 [This passage describes the encounter with angry-Ogre and Satyr-friend] --- **C3** [This passage describes the encounter with happy-Ogre and Satyr-foe] --- **C4** [This passage describes the encounter with happy-Ogre and Satyr-friend.]	If players continue past this first keyword check, it means the Satyr is a foe, not a friend. If players also continue past this second keyword check, it means that the Ogre is angry. Therefore, this passage describes an encounter with an angry Ogre and a Satyr that is the players' foe. At C2, we know the player has the [SATYR IS A FRIEND] keyword, but we don't know how the Ogre feels, so we redirect on [OGRE IS HAPPY] and now know that players who remain at C2 have a friendly Satyr and an angry Ogre. A special note on "C1-type" entries: These entries describe what happens when players return to a location. Ideally, players have the opportunity to use items at the location without any other narrative complication. In order to facilitate this, it is generally useful if all possible outcomes of an encounter leave the location in more or less the same unpopulated state. In this example, if all outcomes of the encounter end in the house being abandoned, this passage can simply describe the empty house and any details required for item usage in a single sentence. On the other hand, if each branch of the encounter ends differently, with different permutations of happy/angry Ogre and friend/foe Satyr present or absent, then you will need to keyword for each of those permutations and use those keywords to redirect players to passages that describe each possible permutation on players' return. Further, you'll need to figure out whether or not (and how) to allow players to use items at the location.

So far, so good. But now imagine that you want this encounter to be not just responsive but interactive. That is, let's say you want to give players a choice of how to respond to happy/angry Ogre and Satyr friend/foe and then activate dice mechanics. This requires a lot of branching and many entries. You'll need:

- 4 permutation entries
- 8 entries for combat and/or skill checks (2 for each permutation)
- 16 results entries (2 for each combat or skill check)

That equals a large but manageable total of 28 entries. It is possible that some of these branches could be collapsed, meaning that two or more choice indicator or dice results could point to the same entry. For example, if each combat victory results in both the Ogre and the Satyr running away together, you can probably collapse all of those victories into a single entry that describes the same event: Ogre and Satyr running away together. This kind of collapsing, if planned carefully in advance, can be efficient in terms of both your labor and the number of pages of your storybook.

Based on the example above, you can probably imagine how encounters could get increasingly complex as they become responsive to a greater number of player choices. For example, if the Ogre could be happy, angry, or indifferent and the Satyr could be a friend, foe, or bystander, then there would now be 3 x 3 = 9 permutations, requiring 18 entries for mechanics and 32 entries for results. If, on top of that, you wanted it to be possible that the house could be either intact or burnt down by a dragon, then you would have 2 x 3 x 3 = 18 permutations, and ... you get the picture.

The more responsive an encounter is, the more branches there will be. The more branches there are, the more opportunity there is to introduce branching errors (when players are sent to the wrong passage) and narrative bugs (when the right passage says the wrong thing).

In general, there is a tension between player agency and practical considerations for the designer. Players appreciate lots of choices and a responsive game world, but they also appreciate an adventure that is functional and complete. So be careful about the kinds of choices and responsiveness you build into your adventures.

Item Puzzles

Item entries that construct a puzzle for players generally have a single solution, which is a combination of items at a specific location. All (or most) of the other item entries at that location give hints about the puzzle solution.

For example, the Ancient Chapel (location B, *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*) presents a puzzle to players: A bell and a closed door that seem connected. Each of the item entries at this location describes players attempting to use their items to solve this puzzle and open the door. For example, when players use the staff sling (item 93) at this location, they get the following entry:

> **B93**
>
> Ringing the bell seems like a good idea. You load your staff sling with a bit of rubble from the chapel floor and sling it at the bell. It makes a soft, pleasant note that vibrates the durgolium door, but the door does not open. Maybe it would work better if you had some other kind of ammunition.
>
> ? Use another item.
>
> ? Rest.
>
> ? Move to another location.

Each "wrong" answer to the puzzle describes players making an effort and failing. In the description of their failure, they get hints that a) there really is a puzzle to solve here (e.g., the bell rings and vibrates the door) and b) there is a better way to solve it (e.g., this entry suggests using different ammunition).

Item Entries

Each item entry is a unique text that players reveal by using an item or combination of items at a location. Item entries are always listed in numerical order by the first item, and then subsequently by the second number in a set of entries.

These entries tell the players a) what they do with the item (or items) at their present location and b) what happens as a result. For example, when the players use the shovel (item 74) in Jolev (location A, *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*), they get this entry:

> **A74**
>
> You attempt to dig in the cobblestone streets of Jolev. Your work draws the attention of a local Halfling man, who comes out of his house to lecture you on the history of cobblestones in this region. Apparently, these stones came as ballast aboard trading ships from Southern Urtep (URR-tep), and each stone has its own story, which he promises to tell you in great detail. You thank him and move along as quickly as you can.
>
> ? Use another item.
>
> ? Rest.
>
> ? Move to another location.

Item entries can:

- Offer little bits of narrative that flesh out the world,
- Construct puzzles that unlock rewards and locations,
- Offer players a choice that might result in a minor reward or penalty, or
- Tell players that their item or items have no effect at this location, preferably in a unique and humorous way.

Item entries that offer players a choice look like this one, which occurs at the Dunegrass Farm (location D) in *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*, when players use the shovel:

D74

The only thing you can use the shovel for here is cleaning out the pigpens. Is that how you want to spend your time?

? Yes, please. Choose a player to do the work. → D12

? Use another item.

? Rest.

? Move to another location.

If players choose to clean out the pig pens, they are redirected to this entry:

D12

You find an empty pigpen and clean it out. The shovel does not seem well-suited to this task. It takes you quite some time to improve the Dunegrass farm's manure heap. They are sure to be grateful if they ever make it home again. Good work!

⚠ Chosen player: Add three stamina to your fatigue box from the supply.

⚠ If your entire party is exhausted, mark the death track and read the corresponding entry in the Tome of Encounters.

? Use another item.

? Rest.

? Move to another location.

Controlling Scope of Item Usage

Because each item and each item combination requires a unique entry at every single location, writing item entries can become a significant undertaking if there are multiple items available to players at the same time during an adventure. The table below shows how item entries increase as the number of available items increase.

Total Item Entries for Each Location, Based on Number of Items Available:

Items	Combinations	Total Entries Per Location
1	x	1
2	1	3
3	3	6
4	6	10
5	10	15
6	15	21
7	21	28
8	28	36
9	36	45
10	45	55

So, if you want to make 10 items available to players in an adventure, you'll need to write 55 unique item entries at every single location (at the average of 7 locations, that's 385 entries!).

To control the scope of your item entries, you can limit the number of items you introduce into the adventure and/or limit the number of items that are available at the same time.

Before writing your adventure, consider what kind of items you want to use and how many you actually need to achieve your purpose. Include items that enable players to interact with the world meaningfully and to solve one or more puzzles. In general, Roll Player Adventures uses 4 to 6 items in each adventure. Some use more, some less.

Taking Toys Away

While writing Roll Player Adventures, we operated with the philosophy of "Don't take players' toys away," meaning that, whenever possible, we let players continue to use items even after they had served their intended purpose. For example, when players use the proper items to solve the bell-and-door puzzle in **Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy**, *they are not instructed to return the corresponding items to the discovery deck. That way, they can continue to use those items at other locations if they choose.*

However, there may be a good reason to take "toys" away from players, and doing so can reduce the scope of work necessary for writing a complete set of item entries.

For example, in **Adventure 1: Battle at Blacklake**, *players use the Bluestone Fireball (item 65) to blast a hole in the outpost gate (location D), which reveals a new location (location E). Passage D65 reads as follows:*

D65

You uncork the bluestone fireball at the base of the fortified gate and run for cover. A thunderous explosion tears a wide and flaming hole in the wall, giving you passage through.

⚠ Record the keyword OPEN.

⚠ Reveal discovery card 16, and place an XP on it.

⚠ Return item 65 to the discovery deck.

? **Rest.**

? **Use an item.**

? **Move to another location.**

Notice the passage's action indicators. The first records a keyword to account for the state change of the exploded gate. The second reveals the new location, and the third tells players to return the Bluestone Fireball to the discovery deck. The fireball has exploded, so it makes sense that players wouldn't have it anymore. Plus, it has served its narrative purpose of getting players through the gate, so it isn't needed anymore.

Because we took this "toy" away from players, we didn't need to write item entries for the Bluestone Fireball (or any combinations that included it) at the new location (Outpost Interior, location E). Players cannot possibly get to location E and also have item 65. And so, we did not have to write entries for E65, E65.66, or E65.77.

Another way to reduce scope of item entries is to take away one or more items when a new one is gained. For example, in **Adventure 3: Outbreak in Undercity**, *players find the empty inkwell (item 56) and can later fill the inkwell with blood, and if they do, they are presented with the following action indicators:*

⚠ Return discovery card 56 to the discovery deck.

⚠ Reveal discovery card 64.

First players return the empty inkwell (item 56) and then reveal the Inkwell of Blood (item 64). Because it is impossible for players to ever have item 56 and item 64 at the same time, we never had to write any entries for 56.64 at any location in that adventure.

Item Puzzle Difficulty

The difficulty of item puzzles can be controlled in several ways. Some methods include adjusting the number of steps it takes to complete a solution, and adjusting the relative clarity of the puzzle and its hints.

A puzzle's solution can have a few simple steps:

- Obtain item 40.
- Use item 40 at location D.

Or it can be composed of several complex steps:

- Obtain items 14, 22, 30, and 55.
- Use item 30 at location A to obtain item 31.
- Use item 31 and 55 at location C to reveal location D.
- Use items 14 and 22 at location D.

In general, the more steps there are to a puzzle's solution, the more difficult that puzzle will be.

Consider, too, how easy or difficult it is to accomplish each step in your solution. Obtaining an item that is automatically given to players at the location A of an adventure is a much easier step than obtaining an item that is hidden behind another item usage (e.g., filling the empty inkwell to obtain the inkwell of blood.)

Puzzles can be relatively clear with many clear hints. For example, entry B93 from *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy* (quoted in full previously under "Item Puzzles") makes it very clear that there is a puzzle to solve and that players should use the staff sling plus some other item in order to solve it.

Puzzles can also be obscured with few hints, or hints that are unclear. For example, in *Adventure 3: Outbreak in Undercity*, location D (Azema's Bones) there is no hint in the base entry or any of the location encounter entries that this is a puzzle location. However, if players use items here some of them (not all) will give a subtle hint that another item, or another combination of items might return a reward. Using the Empty Inkwell (item 56), takes players to this entry:

D56

You set the empty inkwell on the floor of Azema's hall and instantly feel ashamed that you have not brought a more worthy offering for the mother of the world, so you tuck it back into your pack.

- Use another item.
- Rest.
- Move to another location.

This passage does NOT clearly hint that a) there is a puzzle to solve here or b) that players are on track to solving it. It merely suggests that players feel bad about not making a better offering. Some players might pick up on the subtle hint that bringing back some other item or combination of items would produce a better result, but the text does not give them a strong push in that direction.

In general, the more clear and well-hinted a puzzle is, the easier it will be for players to solve.

Tips for Writing Item Entries

Try to make each entry unique and avoid overuse of stock phrases like "That doesn't work here," or "those items don't do anything together."

When thinking about what items you'll introduce into your adventure, consider what kinds of objects have obvious and interesting interactions with the environment. You're going to have to write a lot of entries about their use, so make sure you've got items that lend themselves to action.

Give players an item right away, either at the very first location or in the "adventure begins" entry. This way, they can engage with this layer of the narrative as soon as possible.

When writing item entries, consider: What more can I reveal about the world? What kind of interactions would be fun or funny? How can I inject a bit of story, mystery, or lore into these entries?

Ending an Adventure

In general, the storybooks in Roll Player Adventures tell players when they have reached the end of the location encounter narrative, but then leave it up to players when to end the adventure and advance characters. For example, when players have opened the durgolium chest, or handled the Trolls, or dealt with the Vampire, we indicate that players can end their adventure at anytime with an special rules box like this:

> Your quest is complete. From now on, when a choice indicator gives you the opportunity to move to another location, you may instead turn to THE END.

In some instances, in later adventures, we force the end of an adventure when players reach a certain point in the narrative. We force the ending of adventures by using action indicators like this:

> ⚠ Turn to THE END.

When we force the ending this way, we try to place warnings in previous entries, indicating that a particular choice will cause the end of the adventure. For example with a special rules box like this:

> Now that [story event has happened], moving to location F will trigger the end of this adventure.

Whether you force the ending or allow players to wander freely after the main story is complete is up to you. Generally, forced endings create a cleaner narrative, shorter playtime, and leave more aspects of the adventure unexplored. Open endings, on the other hand, allow for more exploration and can result in longer sessions.

Campaign Elements

This section covers additional elements to creating your own adventure if you plan on connecting it to other adventures.

What Titles Did You Earn?

Each storybook in Roll Player Adventures ends with a section that responds to all the new titles that players can gain over the course of the adventure. These entries tend to be short (50-75 words) and generally describe the player character(s) thinking about the decisions they made related to the title. Ideally, each entry comments on the acquisition of the title and then gives players a sense of what kind of results they can anticipate later in the campaign, based on the title.

For example, at the end of *Adventure 1: Battle at Blacklake*, if players help the Ogre, Tog, escape the outpost, they gain the title AID TO OGRE and read the following entry in the "Which Titles Did you Earn?" section:

> **AID TO OGRE**
>
> You think back on Tog, the Ogre who you spared from Tarik's blade. His look of gratitude is still fresh in your mind. Strange that, at the end of this long war, you have finally made a bit of peace. He complained that artifacts had been stolen from the Dragul city-states, and you wonder if their invasion of Nalos might somehow be related to this theft. In any case, somewhere in Nalos wanders an Ogre who owes you a debt of gratitude.

The entry clearly states a) how the players earned the title, b) what the player characters might be thinking about their decision, and c) what they can anticipate in future adventures as a result of their actions.

Using Titles and Favor to Track Choices

When stringing multiple adventures together in a campaign, you may want decisions that players make in earlier adventures to affect the narrative of later adventures. To create this kind of long-term choice-and-consequence, Roll Player Adventures primarily uses titles and favor.

Titles

Titles are primarily used to track the state of characters and how they feel about your choices. When a character reappears in the story, use titles to create branches so that the character can comment on past player behavior and respond accordingly. Unlike keywords, which are recorded on the Party Journal, titles are printed on cards so that players can keep them between adventures.

Title cards can also be used to string together decisions between adventures, but are used less often.

Storybooks will sometimes branch based on whether one of the players has a specific named rare card that was acquired in an earlier adventure.

Favor

Favor tracks the overall attitude or impression of various factions toward the players. In Roll Player Adventures, there are three primary factions: King's Guard, Starlit Door, and Dragul. You are free to use these existing factions, or create factions of your own, unique to your adventure.

At major decision points in each adventure, move players' faction favor up or down for one or more factions, depending on the player's choices. These changes are recorded on the Party Journal.

Faction status can pay off in many different ways:

- Branching to have an NPC react differently
- Discounts in a market
- Increase or decrease the difficulty of combat or a skill check
- Open new paths or locations

Feel free to be creative in incorporating faction pay off in your adventure.

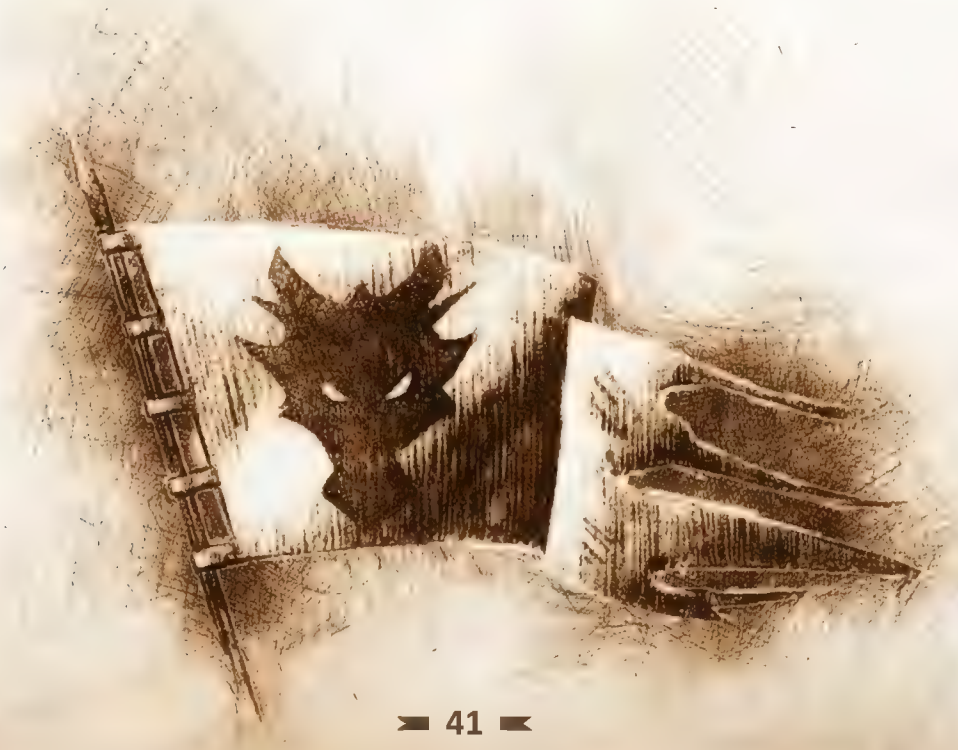
Factions of Roll Player Adventures

The distribution of races into the three factions in Roll Player Adventures is based on the components of *Roll Player* and its expansions. If a race has a character sheet in Roll Player, that race belongs to the nation of Nalos in Roll Player Adventures. If a sentient race appeared as a monster or minion in Roll Player: Monsters and Minions or Roll Player: Fiends and Familiars, then that race belongs to the Dragul in Roll Player Adventures.

Keep in mind that a member of the Dragul races does not mean that they are "evil" and just because a race is of Nalos, does not make it "good". Both sides have different cultures and motivations, and there are both good and evil characters in both groups.

Both the King's Guard and Starlit Door are factions that are native to Nalos, and thus are composed of the same group of races.

Dragul Races	Nalos Races (King's Guard and Starlit Door)
Bugbear	Bastja
Cyclops	Construct
Demon	Dark Elf
Dragon	Dragonkin
Dryad	Dwarf
Flayer	Elf
Gargoyle	Frogkin
Giant Troll	Gnome
Gnoll	Halfling
Goblin	Human
Gorgon	Kaiika
Harpy	Minotaur
Hobgoblin	Orc
Insectoid	Saurian
Kobold	Sheki
Naga	Vargar
Ogre	Wrathborn
Ratfolk	
Satyr	
Treefolk	
Vampire	



Mechanical Design

In this section, you'll find details regarding additional mechanical elements of creating an adventure for Roll Player Adventures.

Dice Events

Though combat and skill checks have a lot in common, there are some key differences that are worth considering when deciding how to set up a dice event.

- Skill checks are faster to set up and are shorter.
- Skill checks never reward gold, while combat can reward both gold and XP. As a result, it may make sense to add a gold reward after a skill check in the storybook.
- Skill checks will never exhaust a party, while combat can.
- Skill checks are much more restricted in structure, while combat has much more variety in how it is configured.
- Skill check difficulty has a ceiling as to how difficult they can be, while combat can be made much more difficult with the use of multiple enemies and multiple modifier cards.

When deciding whether to set up an encounter with a dice event, having a rough balance between combat and skill checks works well, as not all players like to fight every enemy they find.

Some players will prefer to avoid combat and choose branches with skill checks instead. Since players don't get gold from skill checks, this can lead to parties with little gold, and few cards purchased from the market between adventures. So, having some mandatory combat throughout an adventure can be useful to make sure players are buying new cards from the market between adventures.

Dice Event Difficulty

It's best to tailor the difficulty of a dice event to the strength of the party. Though, there's some flexibility here. If there's an event that seems like it should be more difficult due to some narrative circumstance, you can go ahead and make it more difficult.

As a general rule, dice events should be very difficult to complete in the first round, but not impossible. Keeping the dice events challenging, but not impossible is important to players' enjoyment of the adventure.

Adjusting Combat Difficulty

Combat difficulty can be adjusted in a variety of ways. The easiest way is to adjust the number of dice slots on an enemy card. The weakest enemies should have three dice slots, and quickly ramp up to four or five for moderate difficulty. The hardest enemies have six to eight dice slots.

To make a combat encounter more difficult:

- Include target dice slots on the enemy card that are at the highest or lowest ends of the numerical spectrum. Achieving a 1 or 6 on a die is more difficult than a 3 or 4 through dice manipulation.
- Include target dice slots on the enemy card that are identical. Achieving three green 5's is a lot harder than achieving three 5's of three different colors.
- Increase the values on the counterattack icons and the negative round track icons on the enemy card.
- Reduce or remove reward icons from dice slots.
- Add a second or third enemy card to the encounter.
- Add one or more modifier cards to one or more of the enemy cards in the encounter.

To make a combat encounter less difficult

- Use "split" dice slots that accept two different colored dice.
- Use "rainbow" dice slots that accept any colored dice.
- Use "blank" dice slots that accept dice of any value.
- Reduce or remove the values on the counterattack icons and the negative round track icons on the enemy card.
- Add additional reward icons to dice slots.
- Add a positive modifier card to the enemy card.

Adjusting Skill Check Difficulty

There are 15 standard skill checks, each of which use two core attributes from the player's character sheet. Each standard check has four levels of difficulty available in the Skillbook. See Appendix 4 - Skill Check Attribute Pairs.

If you wish to adjust the difficulty of a skill check, increase or decrease the level of the event. In Roll Player Adventures, the earliest adventures have level I skill checks, and increase in difficulty as players continue through the campaign.

Modifier Cards

Modifier cards are usually added to combat, but can sometimes be added to skill checks as well. Modifier cards make a particular combat easier or more difficult, though are often driven by the narrative of the entry.

- If the players are being attacked by multiple of the same enemy, use the [Gang of], [Band of], or [Swarm of] modifiers to indicate there is more than one enemy.
- If you just want to make an enemy harder use the [Powerful], [Hardened], or [Gigantic] to add more dice slots to an enemy. Multiple of these can be used on the same enemy.
- If you want to differentiate two similar combat encounters, you can use a modifier card. For example, if the players successfully completed a skill check before the combat, they may gain the benefit of adding the [Sluggish] modifier to the enemy card to show the benefit of the previous successful skill check
- If you design an adventure than can be used by characters at any point in a campaign, meaning you're not sure how many times the players' characters have advanced, you can set up variable skill check levels using the [Adventurer], [Luminary], [Clan Leader], or [True Hero] modifiers at the beginning of an adventure. See *Sidequest 1: Deathmatch at the Colosseum of Ashes* as an example.

Additional Difficulty Balancing

Some more advanced ways to adjust difficulty include branching for difficulty, multiphase combat, and automatic balancing.

Branching Difficulty Adjustment

You can adjust difficulty by sending players to different branches depending on performance in past parts of the adventure.

For example, let's say we have an encounter that allows the players to either fight Bandits (combat) or talk them down (persuasion skill check). Failure of the persuasion check also lands the players in combat with the Bandits.

The simple method to structure this would be to funnel players who fail the skill check directly to the combat entry offered in the original set of choice indicators. However, players who fail the skill check are likely to enter the combat in a weaker state than players who chose combat initially. So you may want to write a separate combat entry just for players who fail the previous skill check that is easier.

This same principle can be applied broadly through an adventure. If there is a combat encounter early in the adventure that is designed to be easy, but players fail, it may be the result of the party being weaker than expected. It is possible to give players who struggle with a combat encounter a keyword upon failing, and branch on that keyword in future encounters so that they have an easier time later in the adventure. A version of this system is used to adjust the difficulty of the final encounter in the *Adventure 7: Ghost-Eaters of the Forgotten Forest*.

Multiphase Combat

Multiphase combat has two uses — adjusting difficulty mid-encounter and creating special, memorable moments for players. Multiphase combat has additional narrative and mechanical changes that occur between rounds of combat. They are especially useful for creating boss encounters that have a unique flavor. Here's an example of multiphase combat from Outbreak in Undercity, but there are many variations you can create.

Special Combat

The following combat will redirect you to a new storybook entry after the first round. Make sure to read the three possible outcomes once the first round is complete and turn to the corresponding entry in this storybook.

COMBAT: Lord Rokta (38)

✔ Victory at the end of the first round: Lord Rokta retreats under the force of your blows. (Leave any played cards in your discard space.) → F13

✖ Defeat at the end of the first round: Lord Rokta returns to mist and escapes you. → F9

? Neither victory nor defeat at the end of the first round: Lord Rokta steps back. → F12

Note that defeat in round one directs to the defeat entry and does not continue the combat, but Victory in round one will continue the fight.

Narratively, Lord Rokta transforms (as vampires do) in both entries F13 and F12, but in F13, where players have filled all of the dice slots on his enemy card in round 1, he switches combat cards, whereas in F12, he adds new dice slots using a modifier. This is an built-in form of difficulty adjustment, as players performing at a higher level will have a harder adjustment in F13 than players who are directed to F12.

You can also use multiphase combat to introduce new rules between rounds, placing additional restrictions, similar to a modifier, or innovate with twists to the game's core combat system.

Automatic Balancing

Both branching-based difficulty adjustment and multiphase combat are tools you can use to help balance the difficulty of your adventures to the varying capabilities of a given party. In general, as player capabilities go up, you want to make things more difficult, and as player capabilities go down, you want to make things easier. Building some of these into the adventure structure helps keep the game at a consistent level of challenge for the players.

Multiphase combat encounters do not all need to output the same rewards. In this way, you can adjust what rewards the party receives rewards based on their performance, giving slightly better rewards to players who took longer to defeat an enemy than to players who defeated them in one round.

Occasionally, we give mild penalties to players who are overperforming to ensure their power level falls within what is expected for the coming adventures. Be careful to narratively justify these penalties. You may also want to pair a penalty with a small reward to take a little bit of the sting out of being penalized for doing well. For example, if the players lose a bonus play token, you could give them a new trait as well.

Death Encounters

Death encounters are another useful auto-balancing tool. Each time a party is exhausted, they receive a bonus item, and if they die twice or more in the same adventure, they receive an additional benefit that normally would have cost XP to receive. As becoming exhausted reduces the amount of XP earned, giving that additional benefit helps players who are struggling so they do not fall further and further behind each time they are exhausted. The additional reward mechanism after becoming exhausted multiple times in an adventure is also a branching adjustment. The player's first death in an adventure gives you the keyword PASSAGE, which then increases the reward each subsequent time the players are exhausted. As keywords are erased at the end of each adventure, the boost is temporary and should not overcorrect.

Legendary Mode

Legendary Mode allows players to experience significantly increased challenges throughout their campaign. Generally, legendary mode does not come with significant narrative adjustments, but it is possible to add branching narrative for players playing legendary mode, if desired.

Legendary mode adjustments focus on two areas:

- Removing elements of the game that make it easier when parties become exhausted
- Increasing the difficulty of key moments during play

For an adventure to support legendary mode, identify moments in the adventure that rewards players for failing, and add an alternate branch in which that reward is not given.

The formatting for this action indicator is similar to checking for titles or keywords:

> ⚠ If you are playing in legendary mode, [Legendary Mode Adjustment].

You can use this method to increase difficulty of dice events for legendary mode players.

For combat, it's common to add a modifier (or more) to an enemy card, or add additional enemy cards to the combat.

For skill checks, it's common to increase the difficulty of the skill check for legendary mode. For example, branching to use the Thiefcraft III skill check instead of Thiefcraft II. Alternatively, modifier cards can sometimes be used on skill checks as well.

Special Dice Events

To amplify the climax of an adventure, you may want to introduce a unique dice event or puzzle other than a multi-stage combat or modified skill check. A dice puzzle can be combined with a standard skill check, a combat, or be made its own through use of unique discovery cards. Dice puzzles can introduce a significant amount of new rules and may require players to stop and analyze beyond what is normal to solve a skill check or combat, so they should be used sparingly.

A strong, unique puzzle can accentuate a narrative climax by making it feel different for players from a standard combat or skill check. You may also be able to tie the mechanical elements of the puzzle to elements of your narrative.

Designing a dice puzzle often revolves around a core mechanical concept — some twist that plays on the structure of the game. As an example: the core concept for the Elsifor special skill check in *Adventure 6: Bogroot Demon* was stacking dice on top of each other, with the lower die influencing the top one. Narratively, we connected this to the idea that Elsifor is having you "repeat" the test, attempting to do better than your first try.

Most good dice puzzles allow players to use their deck of market cards as part of the solution. The deck represents the player's character, so a puzzle that doesn't rely on using cards can take players out of the feeling that their characters are overcoming the challenge.

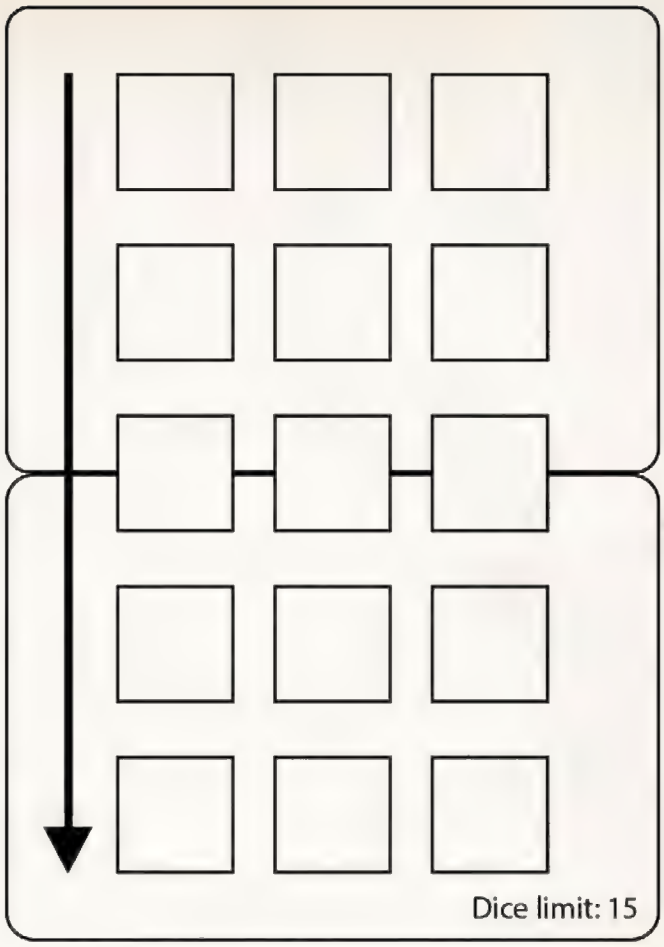
Example Special Dice Event

As an exercise, let's design a special dice event together:

At the end of your adventure, players must brew a complex potion to return a god to life. You want to capture the feeling of combining parts making a chain reaction, so you decide to have a puzzle that revolves around matching dice.

Inspired by "Match 3" puzzles, you decide to have players match the numbers or colors of 3 adjacent dice to "clear" them from a fixed grid.

To help with the spatial aspects of the puzzle, you make a 3x5 grid of dice across two discovery cards. The discovery cards indicate a top and a bottom of the grid and set a dice limit of 15.



⚠ ⏱ Reveal discovery cards ## and ## and put them together near the Party Journal to form a unique skill check.

Then, set up the skill check's special rules.

> After forming the dice pool for this skill check, roll and place the dice randomly on the unique skill check's grid. To pass, remove 12 or more dice from the grid. If 3 adjacent dice in a horizontal row or vertical column show the same number or share the same color, remove them from the grid. After removing dice from the grid, all remaining dice in a column "fall" toward the bottom of the column until there are no empty spaces between a remaining die and the bottom of the grid.

Now, take the time to look at the puzzle above and see how it interacts with other elements of a character. Cards that manipulate the dice are very useful, and both color and number manipulations help solve the puzzle. However, the puzzle relies on there being a fixed number of dice, so adding additional dice to the pool with Scroll or Familiar cards doesn't work well. You may find through testing, that using Scroll and Familiar cards isn't necessary to solve the puzzle, so you could add a line that says:

> Additional dice may not be added to the dice pool.

Sometimes, it is better to allow use of all cards by giving them a second purpose specific to a puzzle. You could instead add an additional rule:

> If an additional die would be added to the dice pool, instead, swap the positions of two orthogonally adjacent dice.

This allows for a new element to the puzzle — swapping positions of dice, while also addressing the lack of utility for abilities that add dice. Each additional rule you add to a puzzle increases complexity, so be careful your puzzle doesn't rely on too many additional rules.

Then, test the puzzle a few times with characters of different specialties - does this puzzle work if the party doesn't have many traits? Is it too easy if a player has tons of scrolls? While testing, check for understandability of your special rules - since the dice puzzle won't be clarified in the rulebook, you'll want to make sure players understand how the dice fall, or see if they have trouble randomly filling in a grid at the start.

Choice Indicators

Standard Indicators

The ending of most entries offer the players a group of choice indicators. These are always placed in a specific order:

- ⑦ Use an item.
- ⑦ Rest.
- ⑦ Move to another location.

Item Entry Choice Indicators

Item entries use an alternate form of the item use indicator. Instead, they are phased: "⑦ Use another item."

If there is an additional narrative choice as part of the entry (for example to shovel out the pig pens), this should be listed above these standard indicators.

If players are no longer able to use items at a location (for example if they just exploded the outpost gate or solved the bell-and-door puzzle in the ancient chapel), then the first choice indicator (i.e., "Use another item") should be removed.

Road Encounter Choice Indicators

Road encounter entries that end an encounter have only two choice indicators, in this order:

- ⑦ Rest.
- ⑦ Move to the next location on your path.

Turning Off Choice Indicators

At a given location, it's important to remember all possible states the location can be in. When a location is very dynamic, it may require removing some of the standard choice indicators from certain entries. The most common adjustment is removing item usage.

For example, in *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy*, at entry B85.93, the player has completed the Staff Sling + Ball of Elvish Silver puzzle. The entry does not offer item usage, plus the party records the DISCOVER keyword that routes them to an entry without item usage when they return to the location. If the players are allowed to use items here, they would read hints about solving the puzzle that they've already solved, creating a narrative bug.

Special Action Indicators

There are some special action indicators that have additional guidelines for their use.

Creating a Market

In some adventures, the players have an opportunity to purchase market cards during the narrative, instead of between adventures. Usually the number of cards and the type of cards available to the players is limited. It's best to create a narrative reason why this is true. A blacksmith may only offer weapon and armor cards, or a creature shop owner may only offer familiar cards. Here is an example action indicator to set up a market:

> ⚠ Shuffle the weapon deck and reveal two cards. Place them face up next to the adventure map to create a market.

Often, there's a price adjustment on market cards in the market based on the party's faction. These additional rules are presented in a "rules box". Example:

> *Example: While at location A, you may buy cards from this market for their price. If your ✋ is higher than your 🐉, the price of each card at this market is reduced by one gold. If you buy a card, add it to one player's hand.*

Include a thematic choice indicator at all location entries that the players will read after setting up the market. Example:

> ? Buy a weapon from Rose.

This choice indicator should appear on all appropriate location entries at a location, but should not be included in item entries at the location.

You may not want to make a market available to the players immediately. It's possible to open the market after the players have completed a quest or other task. This can require use of keywords and branching to make sure players who have not completed the task do not see the choice indicator offering the opportunity to buy cards.

Death Check Timing

Any time the entire party may be exhausted, the entry will include a death check:

> ⚠ If your entire party is exhausted, mark the death track and read the corresponding entry in the Tome of Encounters.

Death checks are necessary every time the players exit combat with a fail result, or the storybook adds stamina to the players' fatigue box as part of an action indicator. Standard skill checks do not require a death check, no matter the outcome.

When the party is exhausted and goes to the death section of a road encounter book, like the Tome of Encounters, they will return to the base entry of the current location. If a death check is too early in a set of indicators, they may miss critical keywords, or title cards. So, often the death check is delayed to later in the narrative branching to make sure the players have all the required information to continue the game, even if they are exhausted.

> *Example: In Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy, at entry F6, if the players lose the combat against Songak, it's likely the party is exhausted. The defeat sends them to F14, which does not include a death check. There is important information in this entry. Instead, it sends the players to entry A5, which includes a death check after all the critical information is received by the party.*

Forced Move

It's possible to close down a location, or force the party to another location. This is usually done for narrative reasons like a location is collapsing and will be removed from the adventure map, or the party is imprisoned and forced to move. In this instance, the choice indicator for moving is written as an action indicator. This can move the party to a specific location, or let them have the choice as to which location to move to.

> ⚠ Move your party marker to location A,
>
> or
>
> ⚠ Move to another location.

Any entry that forces the party to move does not have choice indicators.

Continue to New Entry

There are instances in which you may want to split an entry into multiple parts using the continue special action indicator. These entries do not have choice indicators and direct the player to an new entry:

⚠ Continue. → E99

One common use for this indicator is to collapse multiple entries into one. After a choice, or dice event, the outcomes can be very similar. Instead of including mostly the same text in multiple entries, it can be cleaner to have the unique part of each outcome in their own entry, and then use the continue action indicator to collapse them all into a single entry to communicate the part of the narrative that is common across all outcomes.

Another use of this indicator is to hide rare item rewards in the storybook text. If a player sees a choice of A and B and can clearly see at a glance that one of the choices will award a rare card, that may influence their choice. You can use the continue action indicator to move the reward to an entry much further away from the entry with the choice, so it's unlikely that players will see the consequences of a choice on accident.

Assignining Costs to Items

Items usually have a stamina cost between 0 and 2 to use an item at a location. This cost is in place to encourage players to think through their item use options before trying to use all items and all item combinations in every location. By default, all items have a cost of 1, but are often increased or decreased, based on the expected use of the item or items.

There are a few instances in which it can make sense to set an item's cost to 0:

- If the item is used only once, like the Potion of Strength in *Adventure 5: Crack in Kulbak.*
- If the item is critical to forward progress, unless it's late in a campaign where the characters have advanced a few times.
- If you want to encourage players to try the item combination, especially if it's the first item the party receives in an adventure.
- If the entries for an item or combination of items are particularly fun.

Event Tokens

Event tokens have exclamation marks on them, and can be used in a variety of ways to make non-standard entries either at road encounter spaces or at locations. It's possible to branch at the beginning of an entry with the presence of an event token. There are no specific rules associated with them, as they are used as-needed per adventure. An adventure that uses them will have to set up the rules as to how they're used.

Global Map Event

Event tokens can mark the effect of a global map event.

See *Adventure 5: Crack in Kulbak* as an example of how this can be done. In this adventure, the event tokens signify when a prison riot is present or not. Every location is set to an altered state using event tokens and can be "resolved." Event tokens serve as markers for which locations are "resolved" and which still have active rioting. Technically, you could accomplish this with keywords, but you would need to use as many keywords as there are locations, which is clunky, so using event tokens is a better solution.

Cascading Trigger Event

Event tokens can be used to have an action at one location trigger an event at another location.

For example, players could complete some task, like lighting a fire on a mountaintop signaling that the enemy is approaching. The entry could instruct the players to place an event token on a nearby castle location. Then, when the players visit the castle location, the event token sends the players to an entry describing soldiers preparing for war. Placing the event token on the castle serves as a helpful reminder on the map that something changed at the second location and the player's haven't traveled there yet to observe the consequences of the action. This can also be accomplished with keywords, but does not have the visible reminder on the adventure map, and players would not have as much motivation to visit the affected location, making event tokens a better solution.

We invite you to find new and interesting ways to use event tokens in your adventure!

Component Considerations

When building assets for an adventure, there are a few things to remember, especially if you wish to use a mix of existing assets included in Roll Player Adventure with new assets of your own making.

Card Numbering

Thunderworks hopes to continue to create additional content for Roll Player Adventures and will continue numbering cards where they left off at the end of the base game. So, any time you add new cards to any deck that have numbered backs (enemy, discovery, title, or rare cards) denote them in a unique way. This way, players can easily find them from within the existing decks of cards. We recommend using a unique abbreviation for your adventure. For example, if you create a new adventure called "Ruins of Jolev", use the abbreviation ROJ. In this way, your enemy cards would be designated ROJ-1, ROJ-2, etc... on their backs so as to not conflict with those of official future Roll Player Adventures releases.

New Item Cards

When developing new item cards, it's best to number them 65 or higher. This leaves the first 64 entries at each location open for location entries. For example, if you number an item card 1, and the players try to use it at location A, they will turn to entry A-ROJ-1, which is usually used for the entry read when players return to a location they've already visited. Therefore it is often safest to begin item cards at 65; e.g. A-ROJ-65, A-ROH-66, etc.

Special Icons

In storybooks there are some special icons used in the text. They are part of a special font called *rpa-Icons*.

Icon	Text to generate	Purpose
	(!)	Action Indicator
	(?)	Choice Indicator
	(write)	Record the keyword
	(compass)	Reveal discovery card
	(item)	Use an item. Use another item
	(rest)	Rest
	(move)	Move to another location
	(title)	Reveal title card
	(combat)	Combat
	(skill)	Skill Check
	(pass)	Victory
	(fail)	Defeat
	dragul	Dragul Favor
	kingsguard	King's Favor
	starlitdoor	Starlit Door Favor

Backstories

Backstory side quests are a large part of the Nefras's Judgement expansion for Roll Player Adventures. We invite you to write additional backstory entries for your adventures based on the backstories included in Roll Player Adventures, or create your own new ones.

Planning a Backstory

Most of the narrative elements in Roll Player Adventures are collective. In the stories told by location and road encounters, players make decisions and take actions together. Players also make decisions about when and where to use items together. In backstories, however, each player character has a narrative and choices that are specifically for and about them. Backstory encounters are structured a bit differently than location and road encounters, and they make use of different mechanics.

Picking or Inventing a Backstory

To write a backstory, you'll want to either begin with one of the backstories included in Roll Player Adventures, or invent a new one. To invent a new backstory, you'll need a name and a short (30-40 word) hook. For example, this is the title and hook of the Street Urchin backstory:

> **Street Urchin**
>
> Abandoned at birth and raised in a barbaric orphanage until you escaped at the age of 7. You've grown up on the streets and learned the hard way how to be resourceful and survive any way you can.

The hook gives a sense of the character's past and then sets up some kind of dramatic tension for the character to resolve over the course of a campaign. In the case of the Street Urchin, the hook sets up the possibility of encounters with characters from the orphanage and the streets where the character grew up.

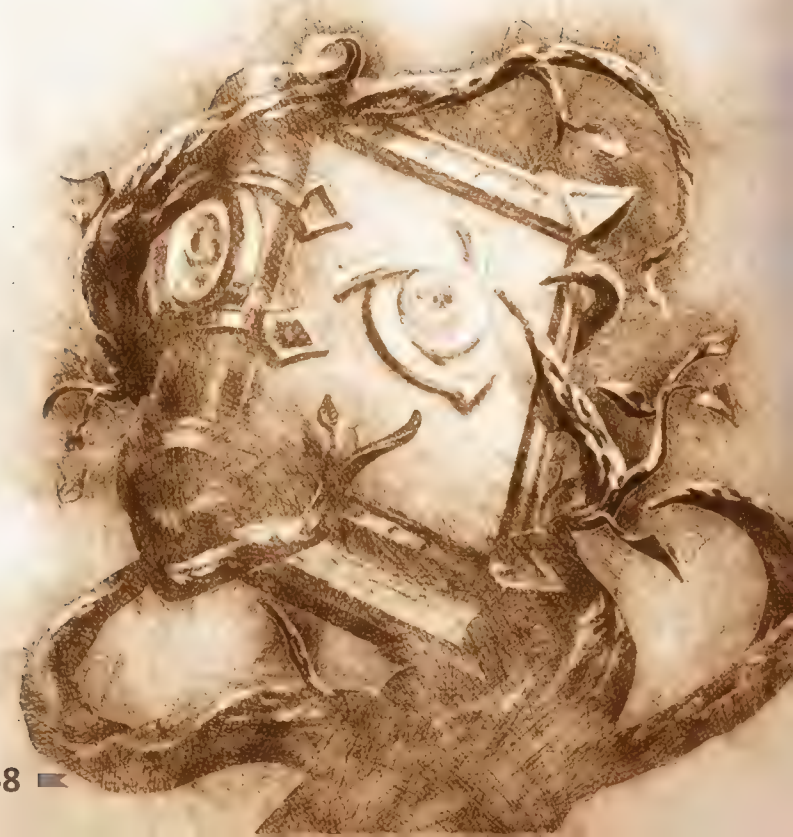
It may also help to choose a central theme or conflict to structure your story around. For example, the encounters of the Street Urchin backstory are structured around the central conflict of vengeance vs forgiveness: will the player choose to get even with the people who harmed them in their past? Or will they choose to let go?

Choosing Backstory Locations

Backstory encounters are similar to location encounters in that they take place at map locations. The guiding rule is that location encounters happen first, and then backstory encounters trigger immediately following the end of a location encounter. Specifically, they trigger when players first have the option to move to another location.

When first sketching the outline for a backstory, it's a good idea to choose which locations the backstory encounters will take place and how you will spread those encounters out over the course of a campaign. When writing the backstories for Roll Player Adventures, we had to accommodate 41 backstories evenly spaced across 10 adventures with 5-8 locations each. Because we didn't want to crowd these locations too much, we settled on having no more than 4 backstory encounters at any single location. As a consequence, we gave each backstory exactly 4 encounters over the course of the campaign. Because you are not operating under the same constraints, you needn't feel limited in the same way. Feel free to write more encounters for your backstories if you want to. However, the backstory sheets only contain slots for 4 adventures and locations, so if you do write more than 4 entries, you'll need to tell players to record extra data on their backstory sheets.

A word of warning: pay close attention to the relative complexity of locations that you use for your backstory encounters. Because backstory encounters trigger after location encounters, your backstory encounters should not conflict with anything that players just experienced in the location encounter. Further, if the location encounter resolves in multiple possible states (for example: a character who is now alive or dead, present or absent, happy or angry, etc etc), then your backstory encounter will need to account for all of these possible states. In writing Roll Player Adventures, we attempted to limit backstory encounters to locations of low complexity, where the location encounter resolves in a single, static state.



Writing a Backstory

The First Backstory Entry

Backstories begin with an entry that is read prior to the beginning of a campaign. These entries make use of the title and hook, present the core conflict or themes of the backstory, introduce the presence of Nefras and the pressure of her judgement, and tell players which adventures and locations their encounters will occur in. For example, this is the first entry of the Street Urchin backstory:

Text	Commentary
Street Urchin By Peter Ryan Abandoned at birth and raised in a barbaric orphanage until you escaped at the age of 7. You've grown up on the streets and learned the hard way how to be resourceful and survive any way you can. Headmaster Raines peers over your shoulder to inspect the button you're sewing onto an old shirt. Displeased, he kicks out the legs of the chair under you, sending you face-first to the floor. "Faster," he demands, before turning to another workstation. It's far from the worst abuse you've suffered at the Woodland Orphanage, but inside you something snaps. You determine that night to run away. You head from Falandore to the capital city of Sabek. To survive, you become adept at all trades: pickpocketing, panhandling, con-artistry, and day labor. Anyone caught sleeping in the capitol is arrested, so the city's poor spend their nights in the "Undercity": a labyrinth of catacombs and sewers.	The backstory's first entry begins with the title and author name... ...followed by the "hook." In the case of Roll Player Adventures backstories, all hooks are identical to the flavor text on the backstory cards of Roll Player and its expansions. Backstories can begin at different points in time in the character's life. In this case, the narrative begins in the character's past, and describes the conflicts that will later be addressed in the backstory encounters. These entries can also do some character work, setting up some qualities of the player character. In this case, the Street Urchin is established as street-smart and resilient.

Text	Commentary
The underworld is many things. "Safe" is not one of them. So when a hooded woman approaches in the dim light, you fear the worst. Pulling back her hood, she reveals a strange, serpentine face. "You will rise to great heights," the stranger predicts. "Yet, like so many others, you will eventually be confronted with your past and forced to make a choice. On that day, be prepared to receive my judgment." With that, she disappears into the shadows.	Most backstories begin with some kind of encounter with Nefras, Goddess of Judgement. She can appear in many forms, and she can transport players to various moments in their own history. Here she appears as a denizen of Undercity. Generally, Nefras appears to set up the tension of her judgement, which is the narrative aspect of the alignment mechanics of backstories.
⚠ Record these Adventure numbers and Location letters on your Backstory sheet: Adventure 3, Location A Adventure 4, Location A Adventure 6, Location D Adventure 7, Location A	The first entry always closes with a list of adventures and locations where the encounters for this backstory will occur.

Backstory Encounters

The structure of backstory encounters is much simpler than the choice-and-dice basic structure of road and location encounters. When we wrote Roll Player Adventures, we chose not to place any combat or skill checks in backstories, as this would mean a single player resolving an extended mechanical encounter while other players watched. Instead, each encounter is structured around a single moral choice and its consequences. At its simplest, this structure only involves three entries: one to set up the choice, and one for each choice. The template and commentary below describe this structure:

Text	Commentary
ADVENTURE #: [Adventure Name] **(Location [Letter], [Location Name])** [Narrative text that describes the character's interaction with the location. They notice an important detail, or encounter a character, or have a memory related to the place] [Narrative text that sets up a moral choice for the character] ? [Choice 1 text]. → BKSTRY.#-2 ? [Choice 2 text] → BKSTRY.#-3	Backstory encounters begin with the adventure's number and name, followed by the location letter and name of the current location. For example: *Adventure 2: Taron's Trophy* (Location A, Jolev) The moral choices of backstory encounters should always set up a binary choice between two different poles of the alignment grid. Normally, choices are lawful vs chaotic and good vs evil, but you can also write choices between good and chaotic or lawful and evil. You can even write choices between good and lawful or evil and chaotic.
BKSTRY.#-2 ⚠ Move your Alignment marker [ALIGNMENT MOVEMENT]. [Narrative text describing the choice and its consequences] [Any action indicators needed to reward or wound players, or to have players record personal keywords (see below)] ? Rest. ? Use an item. ? Move to another location.	Note that, in this template, the letters "BKSTRY" stand in for whatever abbreviation you will use to represent the title of your backstory. For example, the abbreviation we use for Street Urchin is URCH. Also, the # symbol represents the number of the current adventure. So if the Street Urchin were having an encounter in Jolev (Adventure 2), we would title the choice entries like so: URCH2.2 URCH2.3

Text	Commentary
BKSTRY.#-3 ⚠ Move your Alignment marker [ALIGNMENT MOVEMENT]. [Narrative text describing the choice and its consequences] [Any action indicators needed to reward or wound players, or to have players record personal keywords (see below)] ? Rest. ? Use an item. ? Move to another location.	**IMPORTANT:** the choice indicators in this template are standard location-encounter-ending choices. However, it is important that the choice indicators that end backstory encounters match the choice indicators that players face at the end of their location encounter. For example, if players do not have the option to use items at this location, then the backstory encounter should remove the "? Use an item" choice indicator. Alignment movement is the primary "reward" for backstory encounters, but it is also good if each choice results in something mechanically distinct on each branch. For example, one choice could lead to a reward of 1 Gold, and the other could lead to a reward of 1 XP. Ideally, the difference between these rewards also makes narrative sense.

Using Personal Titles

Backstories can instruct players to record titles that are not represented on a card and are not recorded on the Party Journal. These titles are written on the backstory sheet and remain there for the duration of the campaign. This mechanism allows you to write more complex backstory encounters that respond to previous player choices. Branching based on personal titles works exactly the same as branching based on party titles, except that the action indicator used is worded differently. For example, in the Apprentice backstory, the action indicators for recording and checking personal titles were written like this:

⚠ Apprentice player: Record the personal title MENTOR.

⚠ If the Apprentice player has the personal title MENTOR APRN.6-2

Final Judgement

At the end of each backstory, when all encounters are complete, Nefras appears and judges players to see what their final alignment will be. This entry is always called "[Backstory] End" and is read after the completion of the current adventure. This keeps the adventure moving forward, even if one of the players has reached the end of their backstory. There is a special action indication in any "End" entry in case the players are using dual backstories.

Nefras then rewards players with rare cards that match each axis of their final alignment. Nine entries are needed per backstory to support all possible outcomes of the player's alignment: Lawful Good, Lawful Neutral, Lawful Evil, Neutral Good, True Neutral, Neutral Evil, Chaotic Good, Chaotic Neutral, and Chaotic Evil. These entries include a brief text (50 words or less) in which Nefras describes the player's alignment and decisions in a general way. Then, these entries direct players to a short, final statement on their backstory. For example, the "Lawful Good" result of the Apprentice backstory read like so:

Lawful Good

"Despite the tragedy that befell your monastery and forced you into the world, you have persevered and come out the other side a better person." She glides toward you and rests her hand on your shoulder. "Your family, teachers, and friends — alive and already passed — are proud of you and what you will do."

⚠ 💎 Reveal rare cards 58 and 62 and add them to the Apprentice player's hand. (Note that there are multiple copies of each of these cards in the deck.)

⚠ Continue to the final entry below. → LONG ROAD AHEAD

Long Road Ahead

As Nefras's final words echo in your ears, you find yourself standing back in the streets of Falandore. You grip the Chronicles of Ulrir to your chest. Until you pass through Ulrir's gate, you have a mission, and you will do your best to accomplish it, no matter what.

Appendices

Appendix I
The World of Ulos Lore

Roll Player Adventures, as well as all other games in the Roll Player series of games takes place in the world of Ulos. With each new release in the series, the world, its politics, and its inhabitants become more detailed. For the latest information on the world of ulos, please visit the World of Ulos Wiki -

www.worldofulos.com

Appendix 2
Technical Style / Formatting

Capitalization

When writing an Adventure, follow these capitalization rules:

As a general rule, game terms, keywords, and component names are not capitalized. If it doesn't fit one of the other rules below, default to lowercase.

Three-letter abbreviations for character attributes are always capitalized. Example: "Add one stamina to your STR or DEX attribute row from the supply, ignoring the usual limit."

In-universe proper nouns are always capitalized. This applies to the names of characters, races (sentient races only), classes, locations, factions, etc. Example: Tarik Nowlin is a Halfling Rogue. He is a member of the King's Guard. He shows up at Blacklake in the first adventure.

The names of individual cards are capitalized in mechanical text, but never in narrative text.

> ***Example 1:*** "You attempt to throw the shovel with the staff sling, but it only clatters to the ground."
>
> ***Example 2:*** "⚠ If any player has the Gray Matter object card → B5."

The names of keywords and titles are always written in ALL CAPS. Example: An action indicator might tell you to do something: "If you have both of the keywords GOBLIN and ALARM."

In-universe honorifics are only capitalized when they precede the person's name.

> *Example: The two authority figures who appear in the first adventure are General Grik and Commander Zalic. But you would describe them as "the general" and "the commander" (not "the General" and "the Commander") if you are not using their name at the same time.*

Do not capitalize the names of the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) when they are used to imply directionality. Only capitalize them if they are used to denote named regions. Example: You travel south from Canada to reach Alabama. The state of Alabama is part of the Deep South.

Capitalize the titles of specific named booklets and adventure maps. This includes storybooks as well as the Tome of Encounters and Backstory Codex. Example: Adventure 6 uses the Bogroot Demon storybook and adventure map.

The names of artifacts are capitalized when referring to its respective card, but the names of artifacts are not capitalized when referenced in narrative text.

> ***Example 1:*** "If any player has the Onyx Cube artifact card → C5"
>
> ***Example 2:*** "When they see the onyx cube, they both race toward it, catching sight of you as they charge."

Do not capitalize "plane" or "planarverse." Within the world of the game, these are ordinary terms and merit no special formatting; however, do capitalize them when used as a proper noun (location), e.g. Mikto, Plane of Secrets.

The Roll Player Universe follows the APA Style Guide with regards to capitalizing the first word after a colon. If the words after the colon make a complete sentence, then the first word after the colon should be uppercase; otherwise, the first word after the colon should be lowercase.

Number Styling

When writing an Adventure, follow these rules regarding numeration:

As a general rule for sentence text, numbers are always spelled out as words (e.g., "three") instead of written as numerals (e.g., "3"). If it doesn't fit one of the other rules below, default to spelling numbers out.

Any numbers that are double-digits or larger (e.g., "10") should be written as numerals instead of spelled out. This is always true of mechanical text, but can be ignored for narrative text. If a storybook paragraph says that there are a hundred warriors at the outpost up ahead, there is no need to write the number as "100" instead.

> ***Example:*** "You find yourself impossibly trapped between two warring armies in a battle that took place over two thousand years ago.

If numbers appear in a bulleted list where the text is not written in sentence form, always use numerals.

> ***Example:*** The component list in the rulebook will use numerals, including for numbers that are smaller than double-digits.

Mechanical card text always uses numerals by default, both as a space-saving measure and because cards are a very different use case than booklets.

> ***Example:*** On the Kadeema's Axe card, the text should read, "You may immediately play up to 2 weapon cards without counting against the play limit."

Even in mechanical card text, if a sentence starts with a number, that number is always spelled out instead of written as a numeral.

> ***Example:*** One of the players must discard their entire hand.

Ordinal numbers are always spelled out instead of written as numerals.

> ***Example:*** Always use first, second, third, etc., instead of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.

World Lore & Edge Cases

When writing an Adventure, keep these rules in mind:

Rarely talk about time in terms of "minutes" or "hours," as those units of time don't mean much in this world because watches and clocks are very uncommon. However, "days" and "years" are acceptable.

Some of the names of the fantasy races take a special form when used as an adjective: Elvish, Dwarven, Gnomish, etc.

When mechanical text instructs the players to return a card to a specific deck, write out both the card and deck names.

> ***Example 1:*** If any player has the Rune Bones artifact card, return it to the rare deck.
>
> ***Example 2:*** Return discovery card 65 to the discovery deck.

At the end of a line of mechanical text, do NOT include the phrase "if able" or "if possible." A global rule for this circumstance is covered in the rulebook.

For all choice indicators and action indicators, use ending punctuation for the text that precedes the arrow if it is a complete sentence; otherwise do not. For the text that follows the arrow, do not use ending punctuation.

> ***Example 1:*** Side with General Grik. Learn more about Dragul plots. → BEGIN-1
>
> ***Example 2:*** If there is no XP at this location → A1

When mechanical text asks for a comparison between two numeric values, always use "higher" and "lower" as the descriptors.

> ***Example:*** If your King's Guard favor is higher than your Dragul favor, the price of each card at this market is reduced by one gold.

In storybooks, narrative-based text, and mechanical text, when referring to XP, stamina, gold, and a title, do not include the words "token", "cube", or "card". These items are referred to simply as XP, stamina, gold, and title.

> ***Example:*** "Fill each attribute row to its maximum with stamina from the supply."

Appendix 3
Standard Action/Choice Indicators

Action Indicators

Purpose	Standard Indicator Text
Party Awards	
Give a discovery card to the party that is a new map piece.	Reveal discovery card [X] and place one XP on it.
Give a discovery card to the party that is NOT a new map piece. (Usually an item.)	Reveal discovery card [X].
Give a title card to the party.	Reveal title card [X].
Give a rare card to the party.	Reveal rare card [X].
Award the party gold.	Gain [N] gold.
Award the party XP.	Gain [N] XP.
Award the party XP from the adventure map, marking the location as visited.	Collect the XP from this location.
Increase the party's standing with a faction.	[FACTION] +[N].
Heal the party. Can also be "Choose a Player:", if you wish to just affect one player.	Each player: Return [N] from your fatigue box to the supply.
Award a free attribute increase, adding a stamina in the attribute row as a result. Can also be "Choose a Player:", if you wish to just affect one player.	Each player: Increase your [ATB] attribute score by [N] and add [N] stamina to your [ATB] attribute row from the supply.
Award the party a random card from one of the market decks.	Reveal one random [TYPE] card from the [TYPE] deck and add it to one player's hand.
Award the party a specific card from one of the market decks.	Find [CARD NAME] in the [TYPE] deck and add it to one player's hand. If that card is not available, reveal one random [TYPE] card and add it instead.
Award a stamina to a specific attribute row.	Each player: Add one stamina to your [ATB] attribute row from the supply, ignoring the usual limit.
Award a stamina to the attribute row of the player's choice.	Each player: Add one stamina to one of your attribute rows from the supply, ignoring the usual limit.
Award a health increase. Can also be "Choose a Player:", if you wish to just affect one player.	Each player: Increase your health by [N].

Action Indicators

Purpose	Standard Indicator Text
Party Penalties	
Take gold from the party.	Return [X] gold to the supply.
Take XP from the party.	Return [X] XP to the supply.
Have the party lose a title.	Return title card [X] to the title deck.
Have the party lose multiple cards of the same type.	Return all of the following [TYPE] cards to the [TYPE] deck: [CARD1], [CARD2], and [CARD3].
Have the party lose an item or special discovery card.	Return discovery card [X] to the discovery deck.
Decrease the party's standing with a faction.	[FACTION] -[N].
Damage party. Can also be "Choose a Player:", if you wish to just affect one player.	Each player: Add [N] stamina to your fatigue box from the supply.
Lose a health increase. Can also be "Choose a Player:", if you wish to just affect one player.	Each player: Decrease your health by [N].

Action Indicators

Purpose	Standard Indicator Text
Conditional Statements	
Used to send players to the death text in the Tome of Encounters.	If your entire party is exhausted, mark the death track and read the corresponding entry in the Tome of Encounters.
Check if the party has a specific keyword.	If you have the keyword [X]...
Check if the party has one of multiple keywords.	If you have either of the keywords [X] or [Y]...
Check if the party has all of the keywords from a list of keywords.	If you have both of the keywords [X] and [Y]...
Check if the party has a specific title card.	If you have the title [X]...
Check if the party has two specific title cards.	If you have both of the titles [X] and [Y]...
Check if the party has at least one of two specific title cards.	If you have either of the titles [X] or [Y]...
Check the current standing of a faction looking for a high value.	If your [FACTION] is [N] or greater...
Check the current standing of a faction looking for a low value.	If your [FACTION] is [N] or lower...

Action Indicators

Purpose	Standard Indicator Text
Special Indicators	
Read the narrative text below a sequence of action indicators at the top of an entry. Rarely used.	Continue reading.
Move the party to a new location and specify what entry to read, often unique to the scenario.	Place the party marker at location [X].
Setting up a side market.	Read entry [X].
Assigning an action to a specific player based on their backstory	Shuffle the [TYPE] deck and reveal two cards. Place them face up next to the adventure map to create a market.
Moving a player's alignment marker	[BACKSTORY] player:
Restore health to an exhausted party between two skill checks or combat encounters that are chained together.	[BACKSTORY] player: Move your alignment marker [ARROW].
	⚠ If your entire party is exhausted, gain a second wind. Each player: Return [N[stamina from your fatigue box to the supply. Then, add four stamina to any attribute rows from the supply, ignoring the usual limit.

Purpose	Standard Indicator Text
Allow the party to use items in a standard entry.	Use an item.
Allow the party to use items in an item use entry.	Use another item.
Allow the party to take a rest action. Always second last in a sequence of choice indicators.	Rest.
Allow the party to move when in a storybook entry. Always listed last in a sequence of choice indicators.	Move to another location.
Allow the party to move when in a road encounter entry in the Tome of Encounters. Always listed last in a sequence of choice indicators.	Move to the next location on your path.

Appendix 4
Skill Check Attribute Pairs

Skill Check	Attribute 1	Attribute 2
Charm	Wisdom (WIS)	Charisma (CHA)
Concealment	Dexterity (DEX)	Constitution (CON)
Deception	Intelligence (INT)	Charisma (CHA)
Endurance	Strength (STR)	Constitution (CON)
Force	Strength (STR)	Dexterity (DEX)
Interpretation	Intelligence (INT)	Wisdom (WIS)
Introspection	Constitution (CON)	Intelligence (INT)
Might	Strength (STR)	Wisdom (WIS)
Observation	Constitution (CON)	Wisdom (WIS)
Persuasion	Strength (STR)	Charisma (CHA)
Quickness	Dexterity (DEX)	Charisma (CHA)
Resistance	Strength (STR)	Intelligence (INT)
Speechcraft	Constitution (CON)	Charisma (CHA)
Stealth	Dexterity (DEX)	Wisdom (WIS)
Thiefcraft	Dexterity (DEX)	Intelligence (INT)

Appendix 5
Adventure Planning Worksheet

Adventure #___ : _____

Core Concept /High-Level Summary (3-5 sentences):

Party Objective:

How that objective is communicated at the start:

Development in that goal, if any:

Setting Description:

Map Locations

Plot the locations of your adventure on the grid below. Indicate if it is a revealed location, and give a brief description of what happens at each:

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Location Name: _____, Discoverable?_____

Narrative Details _____

Initial "directional choice" between two or more locations, and how this choice is communicated:

Innovation:

Unique Feature(s) of map or mechanics:

Items (Recommend between 4 and 6)

Indicate which item players will get at location A.

[Item name, description, function]

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interesting details the items will reveal about the world as players explore:

Main item puzzle to solve, which item(s) solve it, and what hints there are along the way:

NPCs

Name and short description (1-2 sentences)

[Character name, faction, description, function]

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Choices that award favor:

e. [choice description, faction change/s]

f. [choice description, faction change/s]

g. [choice description, faction change/s]

Ways that favor "pays off" (e.g., skill check bonuses, shop discounts, extra narrative, etc):

a. [faction rewarded, pay off]

b. [faction rewarded, pay off]

c. [faction rewarded, pay off]

Choices / events that provide keywords:

d. [moment, keyword, what is it tracking]

e. [moment, keyword, what is it tracking]

f. [moment, keyword, what is it tracking]

How those keywords will pay off later in the adventure

a. [moment, keyword-based branching]

b. [moment, keyword-based branching]

c. [moment, keyword-based branching]

Choices that award titles (i.e., choices that involve a character who will appear in later adventures):

a. [character, choice, possible outcomes]

b. [character, choice, possible outcomes]

c. [character, choice, possible outcomes]

How those titles will pay off in later adventures (i.e., rough description of the later encounter that branches on tites):

a. [encounter, title-based branching]

b. [encounter, title-based branching]

c. [encounter, title-based branching]

Ideas for 4-5 road encounters and a sense of how two or more work together to tell a story of this region at the time PCs encounter it:

[encounter, choice, details of world revealed]

Rare cards that can be gained

[name, how obtained, description]

Enemies to encounter

[name, difficulty, description]

Notes for climactic battle, skill check, or something else: